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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Management of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

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The Honorable Major R. Owens
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Select Education
Committee on Education and Labor
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In meetings with us, you and Subcommittee staff expressed concerns over the management of the Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) programs and activities. You later asked us to obtain the views of OSERS managers and senior staff regarding how well key management activities were being carried out within OSERS. We briefed you, the Subcommittee's Ranking Minority Member, and Subcommittee staff on February 8, 1989. After that briefing, we did some additional work in order to clarify and expand on our survey results. We testified on OSERS management issues before the Subcommittee on September 7, 1989.

This report summarizes and expands on our February briefing and recent testimony. Our findings are divided into five major areas: (1) goal setting, (2) performance management, (3) human resources management, (4) grants management, and (5) federal/state relationships.

Our work was limited to obtaining perceptions concerning OSERS management activities. In conducting our work, we did not look at these activities from a departmentwide perspective; consequently, we are making no recommendations to the Secretary at this time. However, we plan to initiate a comprehensive review of departmental management practices in fiscal year 1990. This review will expand on our discussion in Education Issues (GAO/OCG-89-18TR, Nov. 1988) on the need to establish a secretarial management system.

Background

In fiscal year 1989, the Congress appropriated $3.7 billion to the Department of Education for federal special education and rehabilitative services programs. These programs are administered through OSERS, whose primary mission is to award grants to help disabled persons gain employment, to assist states in providing handicapped children with a free appropriate public education, and to support rehabilitation research. Program activities are carried out by OSERS' three major components: the Rehabilitative Services Administration (RSA), the Office of

Special Education Programs (OSEP), and the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR). The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OAS) provides overall guidance and direction to these components. (See p. 10.)

In August 1988, we mailed a questionnaire to 250 OSERS headquarters and field managers and senior staff to obtain their views on OSERS management. We received 187 completed questionnaires for an overall response rate of 75 percent. In addition, we conducted structured telephone interviews with state officials who implement programs receiving OSERS funding—state directors of vocational rehabilitation and state directors of special education. After analyzing the questionnaire results, we discussed our findings with component heads and selected division directors and branch managers to gain additional insights into OSERS management practices. (See p. 12.)

OSERS Goal Setting

More than 60 percent of the OSERS questionnaire respondents said that the Office of the Assistant Secretary had done a poor job of establishing OSERS-wide goals, coordinating activities among components, and responding to program concerns raised by senior officials, regional offices, and constituents. State officials had mixed views regarding the establishment of OSERS goals. Most state special education directors believed that the Assistant Secretary did a good job in choosing broad goals on which to concentrate OSERS efforts, but state rehabilitation directors were generally dissatisfied with this effort because, among other things, their input was excluded from this process.

Between March 1984 and November 1986, the former Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services[1] established several broad areas upon which to concentrate OSERS activities—(1) transition from school to work for students with disabilities, (2) supported employment for adults with severe disabilities, and (3) education of students with learning disabilities. The former Assistant Secretary informally monitored OSERS' progress in achieving these goals principally through discussions at weekly staff meetings and by tracking the timeliness of component actions in completing various tasks.

During our OSERS work, we identified management deficiencies similar to the departmentwide weaknesses on which we reported in our November

[1]Madeleine Will served as Assistant Secretary from July 1983 through May 1989.

1988 report. Specifically, despite efforts by the Office of the Assistant Secretary to establish broad goals and track progress in meeting these goals, OSERS lacked (1) a goal-setting process that incorporated input from each OSERS component, and (2) a formal tracking system to monitor implementation of key goals and objectives. In commenting on the development of the broad goals established by the former Assistant Secretary, the majority of OSERS managers and senior staff said the Office of the Assistant Secretary generally did a poor job in terms of involving appropriate component staff in the goal-setting process, making timely decisions, and considering alternatives. (See p. 17.)

Management of OSERS' Components

The performance of OSERS components is difficult to measure because these components do not develop componentwide strategic plans[2] with specific goals and objectives. Instead, components generally develop what we would characterize as operational plans[3] which are consistent with the broad goals established by the former Assistant Secretary, but which lack clear program objectives that can be subsequently measured to determine whether planned objectives are achieved. Only RSA had developed strategic program plans with specific goals and measurable objectives in fiscal years 1986-88, but such a plan was not developed for fiscal year 1989 because of leadership and staffing changes within RSA. (See p. 20.)

Unit Level Operational Planning

One hundred and nine of our questionnaire respondents at the organizational unit level (divisions and branches within OSERS components) were aware that their units had operating plans, of which 79 percent believed the plans helped them to better execute their day-to-day activities. However, many of these respondents cited barriers to successful implementation of unit level plans, such as insufficient staff to carry out important functions and inadequate authority to make needed decisions. Eighty-one percent of the questionnaire respondents stated that many of OSERS' operational practices had negatively affected their ability to properly manage their day-to-day activities. One example cited frequently was the former Assistant Secretary's direct involvement in approving travel for component personnel. (See p. 24.)

[2]Strategic plans are plans developed to (a) analyze organizational environment, (b) assess organizational strengths and weaknesses, (c) consider alternatives, (d) establish clear objectives, (e) assign responsibility, (f) link planning efforts, and (g) establish feedback mechanisms.

[3]Operational plans are annual plans prepared in support of anticipated budget expenditures.

Human Resources Management

Respondents identified a variety of human resource management problems within their components. For example, more than 75 percent of the respondents indicated that staff vacancies, staff in acting management positions, and the lack of appropriate training courses and/or access to training were problems.

With respect to filling vacancies, 55 percent of questionnaire respondents said their components seldom could fill critical vacancies when they occur. Respondents also indicated that employee turnover had decreased the number of qualified staff in their units, decreased OSERS efficiency and effectiveness, and greatly decreased employee morale. In addition to OSERS managers, many state directors for rehabilitative services (37) and state directors for special education (31) told us that vacant OSERS managerial positions and persons functioning in acting capacities were having a negative effect upon state programs because, among other things, program decisions were being postponed.

In following up on these concerns, we found some progress being made in filling vacancies. As of February 1988, 21 of 56 key OSERS positions (such as component heads, division directors, and branch managers) were vacant or being filled on an acting basis because of (a) various personnel procedures, such as the inability to pay relocation expenses for new hires, (b) limited promotion potential, and (c) uncooperative OSERS administrative staff. As of February 1989, 14 of 56 key positions remained vacant or filled with acting managers.

Inadequately trained staff was cited repeatedly as a problem by both OSERS employees and state officials. Yet, only 15 percent of the respondents said that Department-sponsored internal training and development programs were effective in improving the performance of participating employees. Respondents believed training was ineffective because training courses offered to OSERS headquarters staff through the Department's Horace Mann Learning Center in Washington, D.C., included managerial and administrative courses only; the center does not offer training in specialized subject matter. OSERS' regional staff told us they could not attend management courses at the center because funds were unavailable to pay their travel costs or per diem expenses. In addition, OSERS officials told us that travel funding to attend out-of-town seminars and training conferences was difficult to obtain because of budget restrictions. (See p. 28.)

Grants Management

Virtually all (95 percent) of OSERS' $3.7 billion fiscal year 1989 budget is devoted to the award and administration of discretionary and formula grants.[4] However, 58 of 119 questionnaire respondents with grant responsibilities identified inadequate OSERS evaluation and monitoring of grantee performance as serious problems in both discretionary and formula grants. (See p. 33.)

Discretionary Grants

OSERS awarded 2,366 discretionary grants totaling $338 million during fiscal year 1988.[5] However, only 5 percent of the discretionary grant recipients received an on-site monitoring visit by OSERS officials during the year. Telephone discussions with grantees were the most common monitoring method. Many respondents told us that telephone monitoring is used in place of site visits because of limited travel budgets. However, the disadvantage to relying on telephone monitoring is the lack of on-site verification of grantee performance. (See p. 35.)

Formula Grants

In regard to the $3.3 billion in formula grants that OSERS administers, 57 percent of the questionnaire respondents with formula grant responsibilities believed monitoring of these grants was inadequate. This problem seemed to be most prevalent in the Office of Special Education Programs, which administers the Education of the Handicapped Act program.

Grantee data (provided to us by OSERS officials) show that formula grants awarded to 13 of 51 state education agencies were not evaluated by OSERS personnel during fiscal years 1985 through 1988. Insufficient travel funds and staff vacancies were cited by respondents as the primary causes of this problem.

When monitoring visits were made, formal monitoring feedback was delayed for long periods. In fact, 22 state special education directors said it sometimes took 18 months or longer to receive a final monitoring report from OSERS. (See p. 38.)

[4]OSERS discretionary grants are distributed competitively based on proposals submitted by prospective grantees. OSERS formula grants are distributed to states based on statutory provisions that require allocations to be made on the basis of certain criteria, such as the number of handicapped children in each state who are receiving special education and related services.

[5]Data unavailable for fiscal year 1989.

Federal/State Relationships

State special education and vocational rehabilitation directors identified several problems regarding their states' relationship with OSERS. For example, as discussed previously, most special education directors were concerned about the level of program monitoring carried out by the Office of Special Education Programs. Vocational rehabilitation directors were critical of OSERS program direction, policy guidance, and RSA's technical assistance.

Most state vocational rehabilitation directors viewed the Office of the Assistant Secretary and RSA's central office as lacking commitment and support for rehabilitation programs. In fact, 80 percent of the state vocational rehabilitation directors stated that the partnership between their state agencies and RSA headquarters officials has deteriorated or ceased to exist in the last few years.

Written federal policy guidance provided to the states by OSEP and RSA was generally characterized as moderately useful but untimely. Of the 51 state special education directors, 33 told us that the written policy guidance received from OSEP was untimely. Similarly, 43 of 51 state vocational rehabilitation directors said RSA's policy guidance was untimely.

Both state vocational rehabilitation and special education directors were critical of OSERS technical assistance efforts. Many state vocational rehabilitation directors also said that on-site technical assistance provided by RSA staff was ineffective. Although requests for technical assistance continued to be made, OAS frequently denied such requests, primarily because of insufficient travel funds. In regard to OSEP, it was OSERS policy for headquarters personnel to limit technical assistance to sending copies of pertinent information to state officials. On-site technical assistance was supposed to be provided by the Department's regional resource centers. (See p. 41.)

Agency Comments

By letter dated September 5, 1989, the Department of Education said it generally agreed with our findings and discussed its planned actions to address the management concerns we identified. (See app. VI.)

As arranged with your office, we are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of Education, the Office of Management and Budget, and other interested parties. Please call me on (202) 275-5365 if you or your staff have any questions about this report. Other major contributors are listed in appendix VII.

Sincerely yours,

William J. Gainer
Director, Education and
Employment Issues

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Abbreviations

MIS	Management Improvement Service
NIDRR	National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research
OAS	Office of the Assistant Secretary
OSEP	Office of Special Education Programs
OSERS	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
RSA	Rehabilitation Services Administration

Department of Education: Management of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

Background

In 1979, when the Department of Education was created, the Congress established the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) to bring together federal education and training programs designed to assist handicapped individuals. These programs were formerly the responsibility of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

OSERS has three major components: the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), and the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR). The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OAS) provides overall guidance and direction to these components.

OSEP provides grants to states to assist them in providing a free appropriate public education and related services to children with handicaps. RSA provides funds to state vocational rehabilitation agencies to help physically and mentally disabled persons become gainfully employed. NIDRR provides discretionary grants to states, public and private agencies, and other organizations to support the conduct of research, demonstration projects, and related activities, including training of persons who provide rehabilitation services or conduct rehabilitation research. (See fig. 1.) RSA is the only OSERS component with regional staff to help carry out its responsibilities.

All three component heads report to the Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. The commissioner of RSA and the director of NIDRR are both presidential appointees.

OSERS' fiscal year 1989 budget appropriation was $3.7 billion, which represents about 17 percent of the total Department of Education budget, as shown in figure 2. OSERS had a staff allocation of 424 full-time personnel in fiscal year 1989—135 in OSEP, 213 in RSA, 33 in NIDRR, and 43 in OAS.

Figure 1

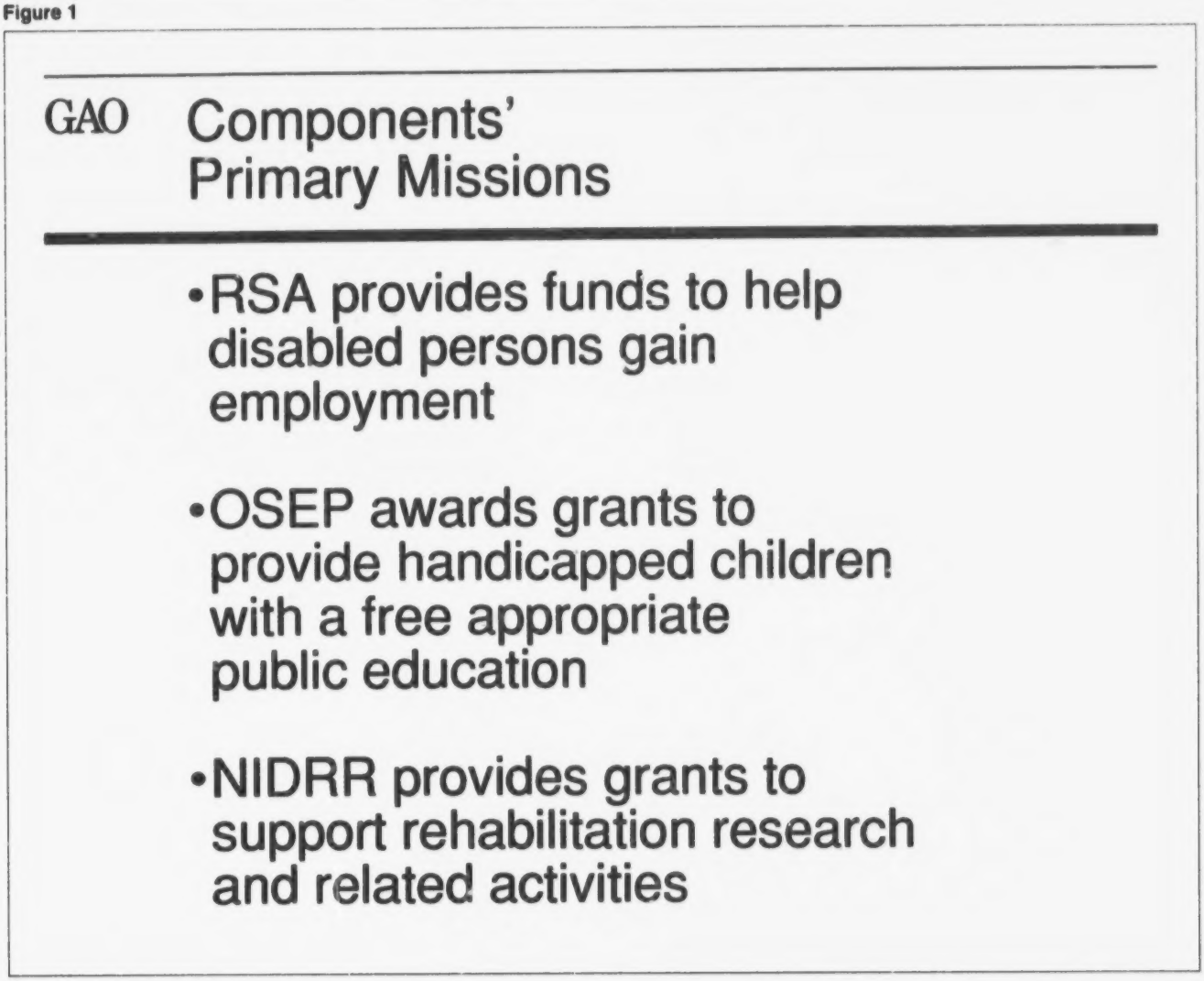
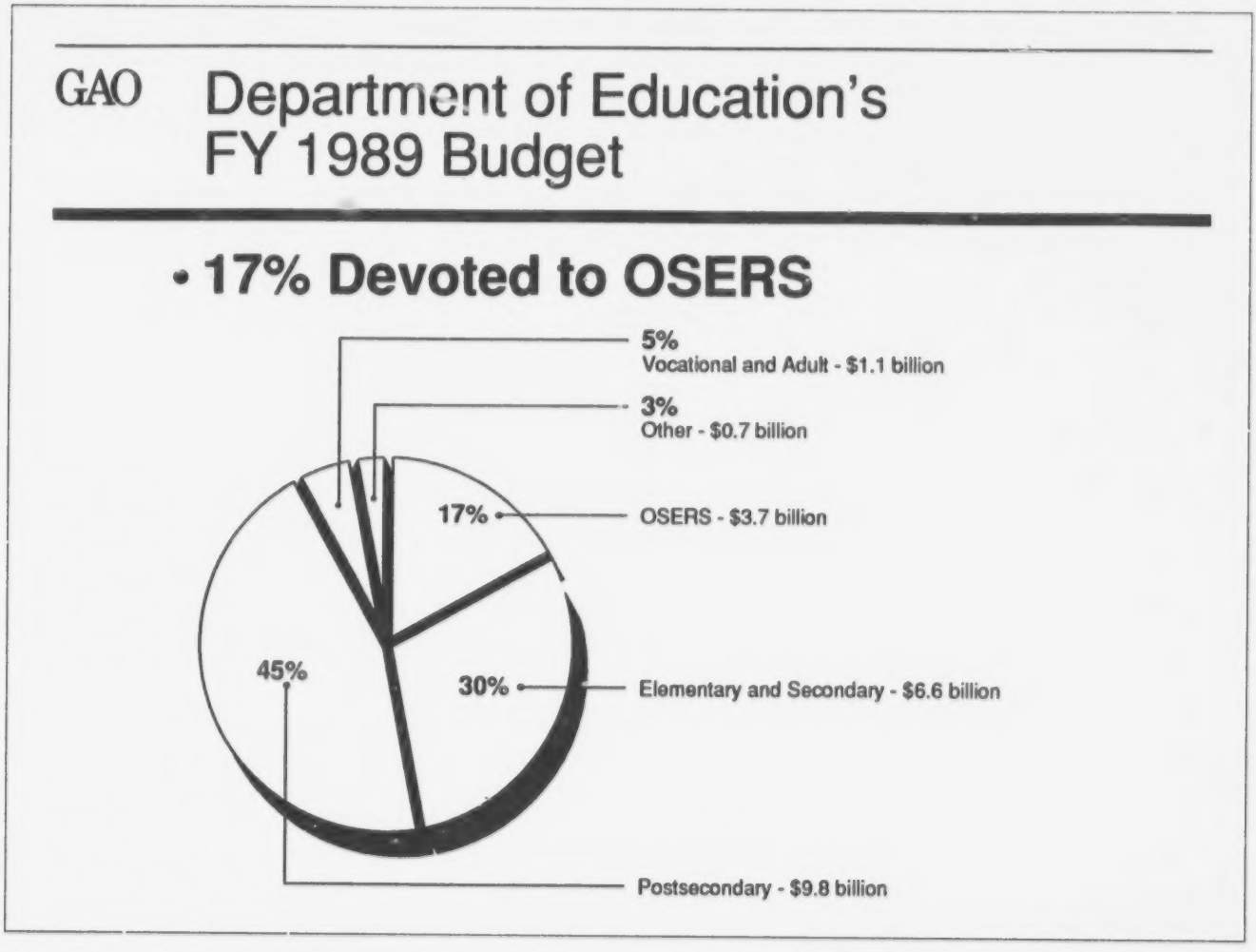

GAO
Components' Primary Missions
•RSA provides funds to help disabled persons gain employment
•OSEP awards grants to provide handicapped children with a free appropriate public education
•NIDRR provides grants to support rehabilitation research and related activities

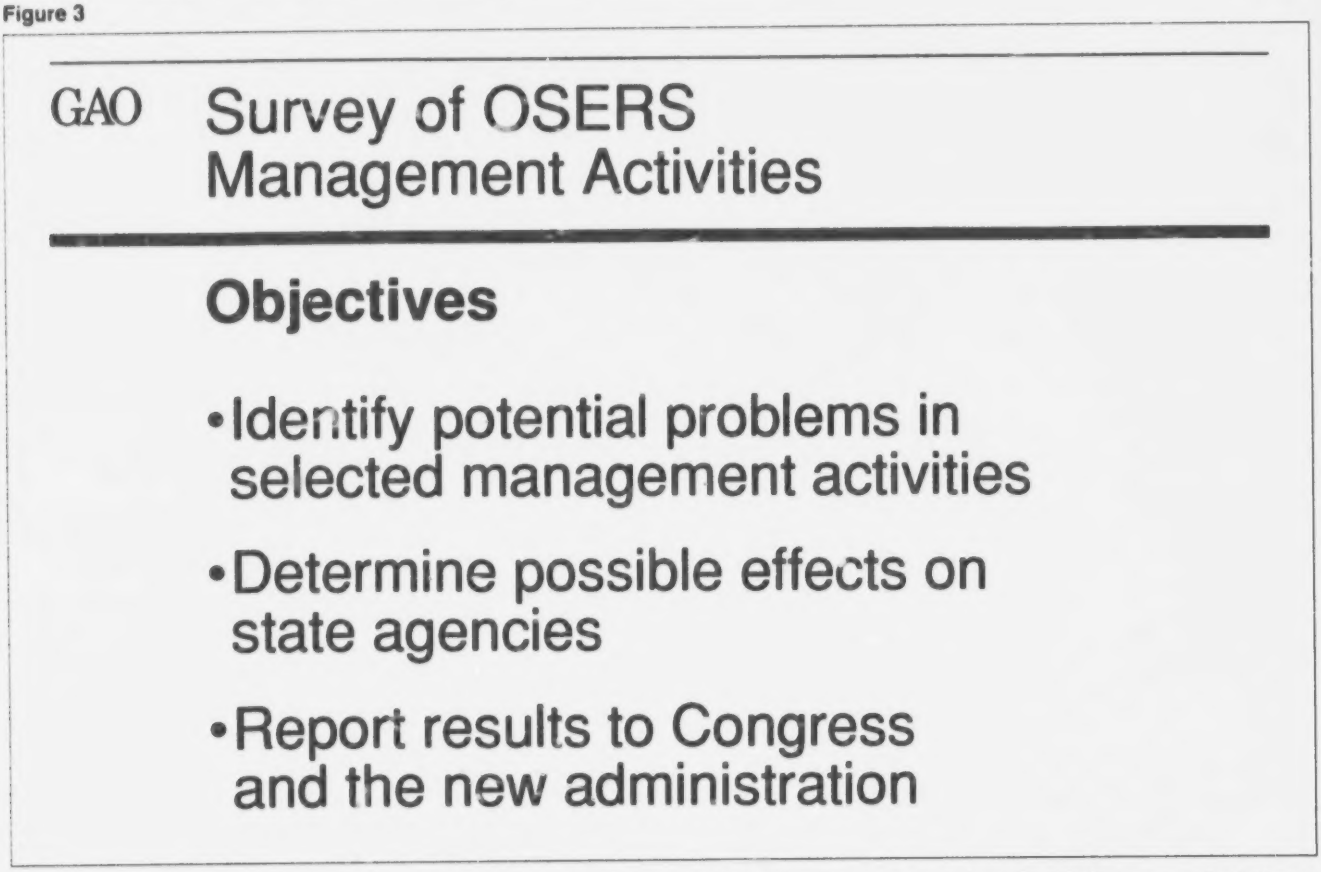
Figure 2



Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

During November 1987 oversight hearings and in our later meetings with the Chairman, Subcommittee on Select Education, House Committee on Education and Labor, and the Subcommittee's staff, concern was expressed over the management of one of OSERS' three organizational components, RSA. In a February 1988 meeting with the Subcommittee Chairman and his staff, we agreed to obtain the perceptions of OSERS managers and senior staff regarding selected management activities. Such a study was expected to aid the Subcommittee in its oversight

Figure 3


GAO
Survey of OSERS Management Activities
Objectives
•Identify potential problems in selected management activities
•Determine possible effects on state agencies
•Report results to Congress and the new administration

function and be useful to the key agency heads of the new administration. (See fig. 3.)

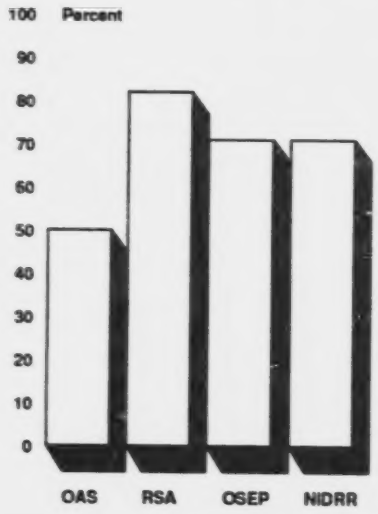
During August 1988, we mailed a questionnaire to 250 managers and senior staff in OSERS. To obtain candid answers we promised these individuals that all information collected would be kept confidential and not be linked with individual employees.

The questionnaire was developed, in part, using questions designed by our office for earlier departmentwide management studies at the Departments of Labor and Health and Human Services. It was modified, however, to reflect OSERS' specific management systems based on comments from former and current officials of OSERS' three organizational

Figure 4

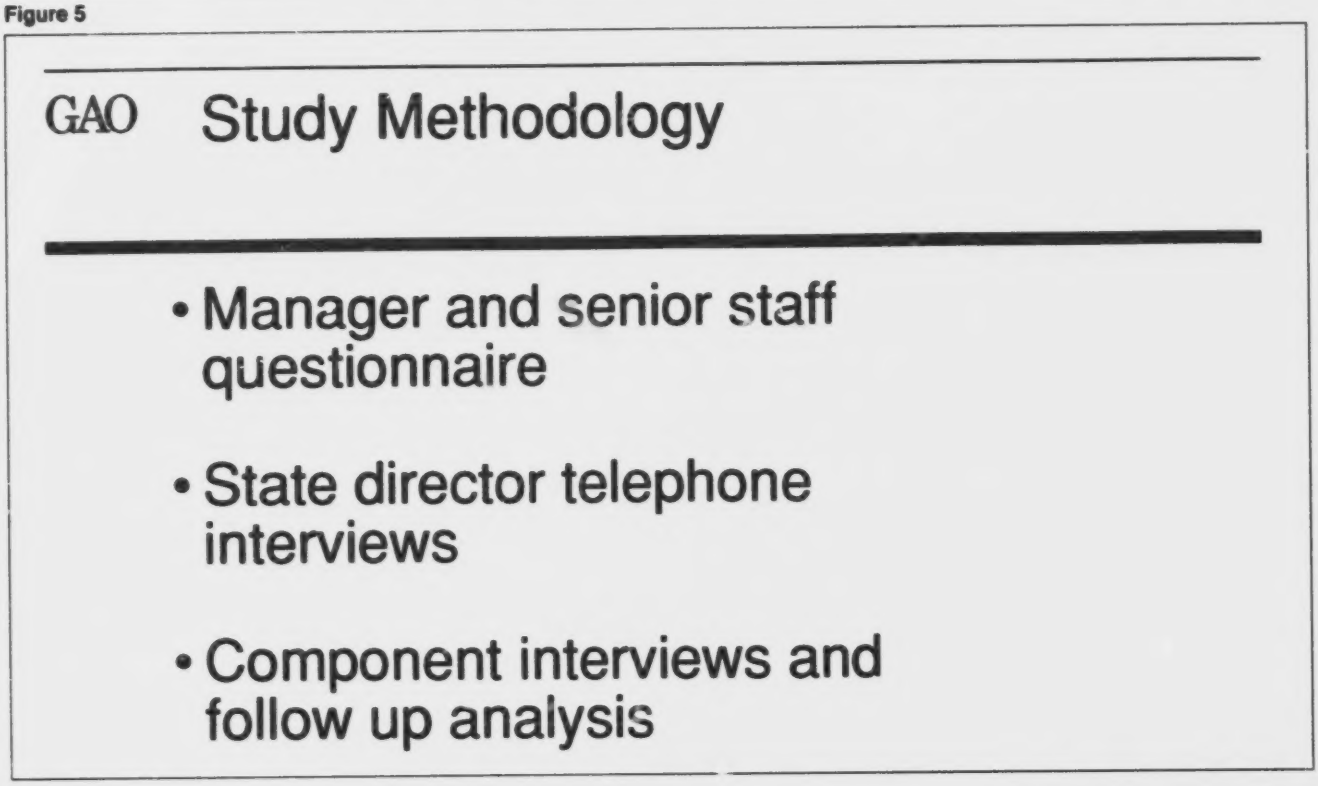
GAO Manager and Senior Staff Questionnaire

Response Rates by OSERS Components



components. We pretested the questionnaire with managers in all three OSERS components and provided copies of the draft questionnaire for review to OSERS officials and the Department's Office of Legislation, Office of General Counsel, and Office of Planning, Budgeting, and Evaluation. The questionnaire was then revised to incorporate, to the extent we considered appropriate, all relevant comments.

Figure 5

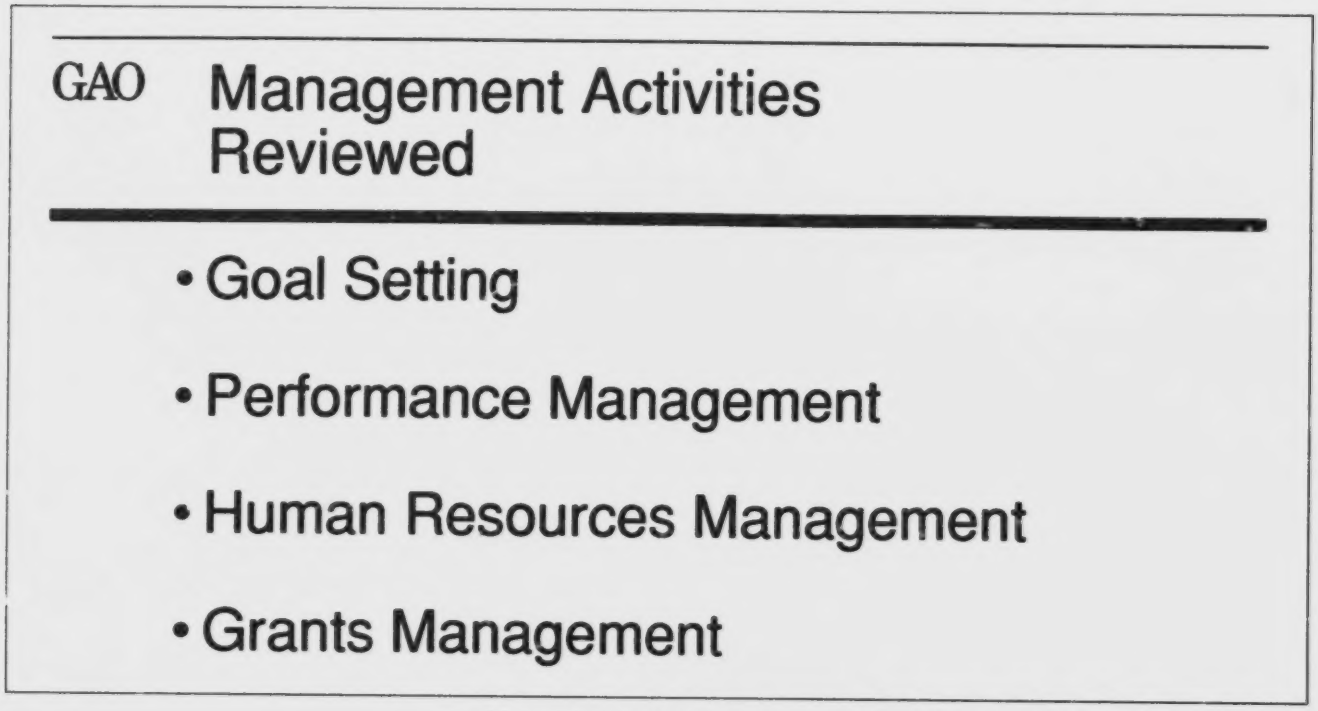

GAO
Study Methodology
• Manager and senior staff questionnaire
• State director telephone interviews
• Component interviews and follow up analysis

We received 189 questionnaires of the 250 distributed, but 2 questionnaires were incomplete. As a result, we included 187 in our analysis for a response rate of 75 percent. The percentages of questionnaires returned to us by individuals in OAS and each OSERS component are shown in figure 4.

We also used structured telephone interviews to obtain the views of state officials who interact with OSERS staff and implement OSERS programs—namely, state directors of vocational rehabilitation and of special education. We asked them to evaluate the leadership, responsiveness to state needs, and quality of services provided by OSERS.

In addition, we briefed the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member of the House Select Education Subcommittee on our study results on February 9, 1989. We also (1) met with each component head to present our findings, (2) held discussions with several groups of division directors

Figure 6

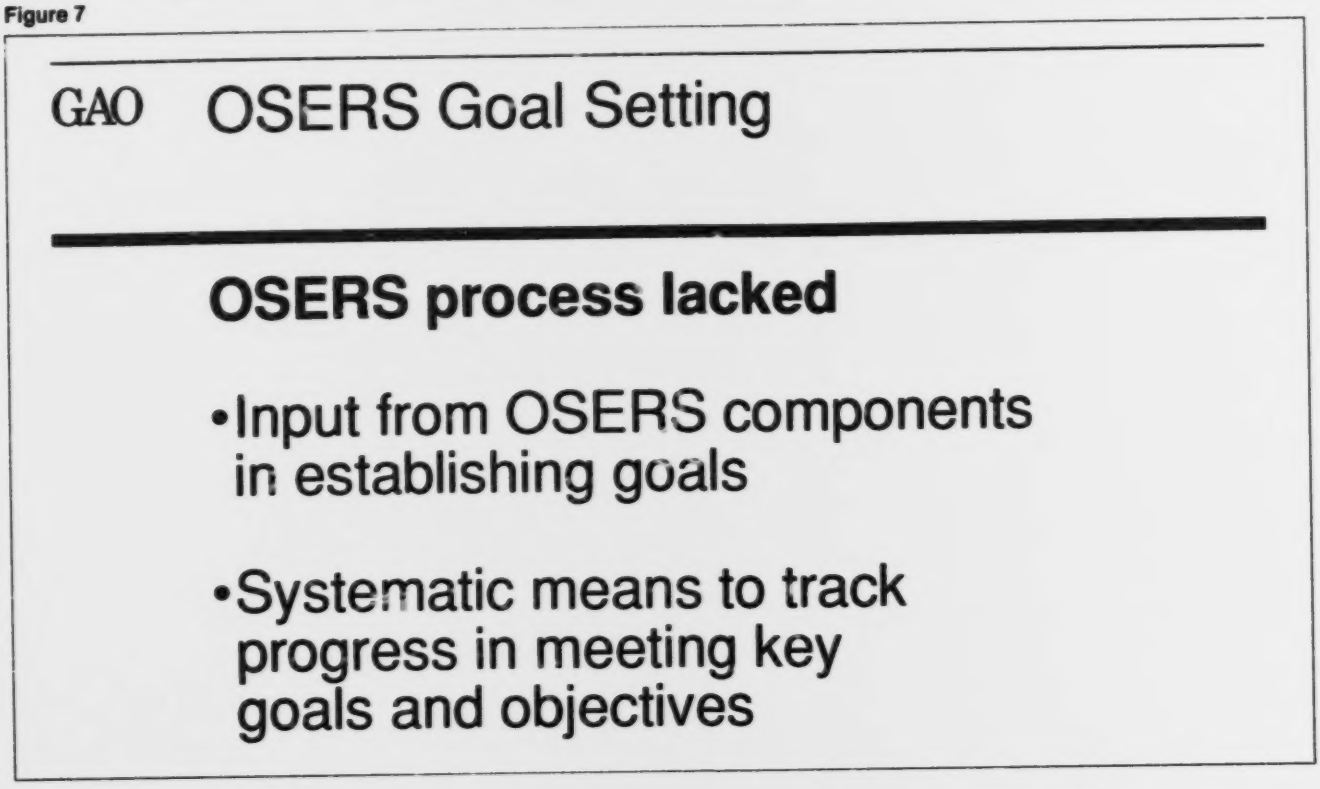


and branch chiefs to obtain certain additional information, and (3) requested additional documentation from OSERS officials in order to clarify and expand upon information provided in the initial phase of our assignment. (See fig. 5.)

Figure 6 shows the major management activities our study addressed. Goal setting, performance management, and human resources management were selected because they are important functional areas of an agency's operations, our experience in reviewing various agency operations has shown. Grants management was added because that is one of OSERS' primary activities and absorbs the vast majority of its resources. Our work was limited to obtaining the perceptions of OSERS management activities. In conducting our work, we did not look at these activities from a departmentwide perspective; consequently, we are making no recommendations to the Secretary.

Our study was done from February 1988 through April 1989 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Figure 7


GAO OSERS Goal Setting
OSERS process lacked
•Input from OSERS components in establishing goals
•Systematic means to track progress in meeting key goals and objectives

Goal Setting and Tracking

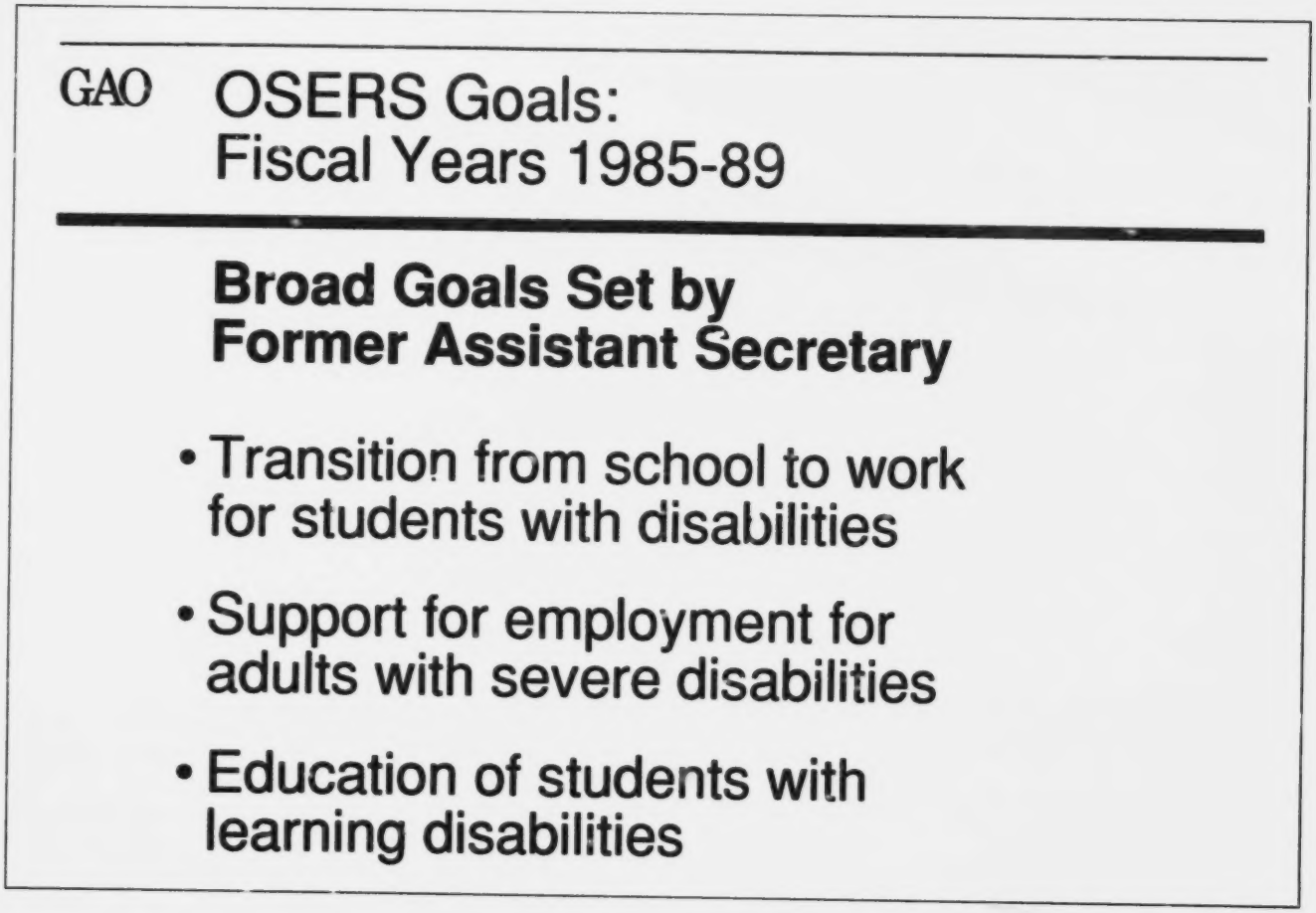
OAS performed certain OSERS-wide goal-setting and tracking functions. OSERS managers and senior staff said, however, that the goal-setting process did not include input from OSERS components. In addition, there was no tracking system to monitor implementation of key goals and objectives. (See fig. 7.)

Setting Goals

During her tenure from July 1983 through May 1989, the former Assistant Secretary established three broad goals or initiatives. (See fig. 8.)

A national priority on improving the transition from school to working life for all individuals with disabilities was established by the former Assistant Secretary and described in an article published in the March/April 1984 issue of Programs for the Handicapped, Clearinghouse on the Handicapped. The support for the employment of adults with severe

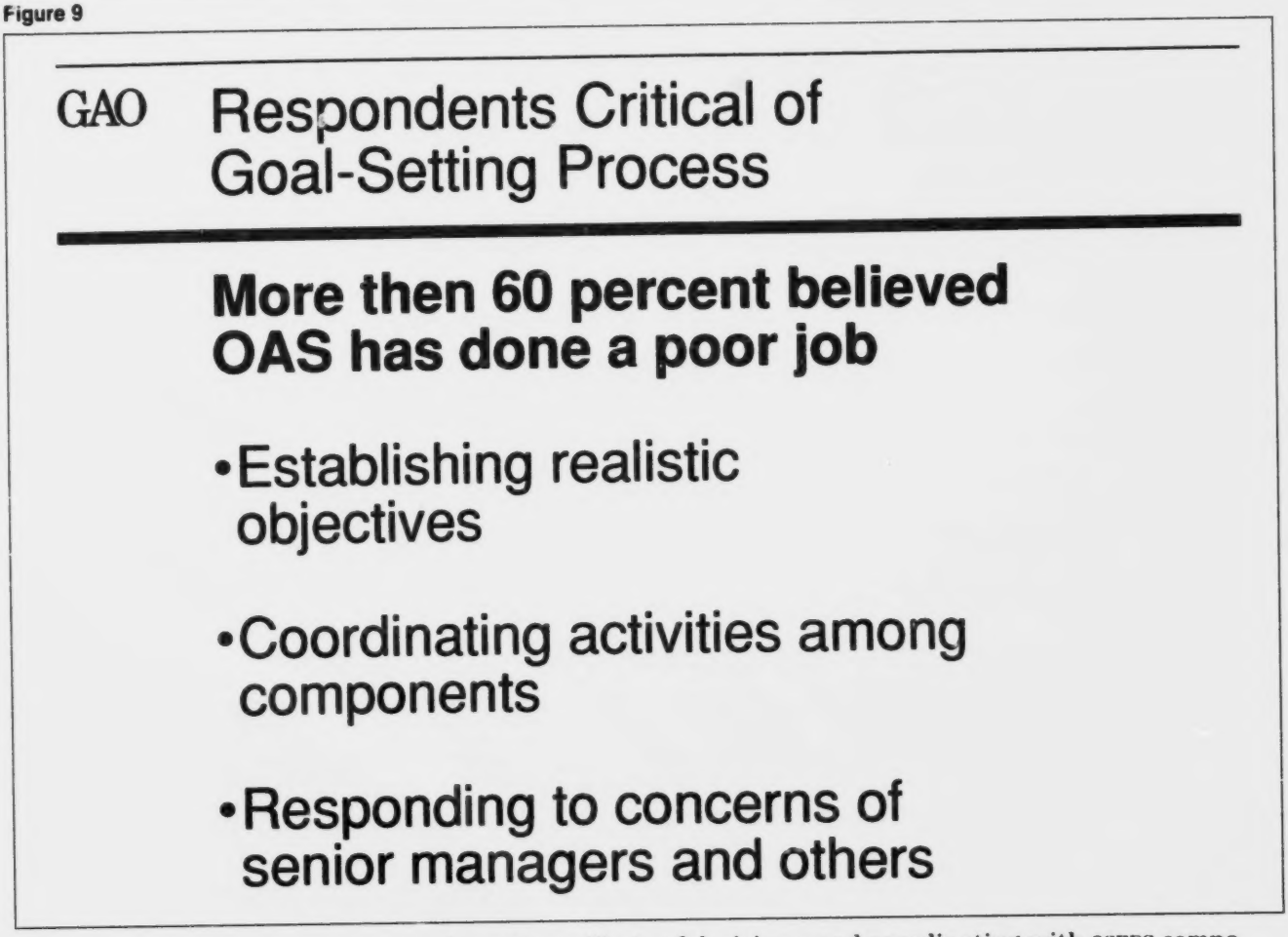
Figure 8


GAO
OSERS Goals:
Fiscal Years 1985-89
Broad Goals Set by
Former Assistant Secretary
• Transition from school to work for students with disabilities
• Support for employment for adults with severe disabilities
• Education of students with learning disabilities

disabilities initiative was described in a fiscal year 1985 OSERS position paper, intended for review by interested parties while the program was being considered by the Congress. Increasing the educational success of children with learning problems was established as an OSERS goal and published in a November 1986 booklet written by the former Assistant Secretary.

Although broad goals were established, the majority of respondents to our questionnaire said OAS generally did a poor job of involving appropriate staff, making timely decisions, considering alternatives and the

Figure 9


GAO
Respondents Critical of Goal-Setting Process
More then 60 percent believed OAS has done a poor job
•Establishing realistic objectives
•Coordinating activities among components
•Responding to concerns of senior managers and others

long-term effects of decisions, and coordinating with OSERS components during the goal formulation process. More than 60 percent of the respondents said OAS did a less-than-adequate job of establishing broad program priorities for each component. For example, respondents said that OAS did a poor or very poor job of (1) establishing realistic OSERS-wide goals and objectives, (2) coordinating activities requiring cooperation between OAS and the components, and (3) responding to major concerns surfaced by senior managers, regional offices, and constituents. (See fig. 9.)

While OSERS initiatives generally related to the broad goals established by the former Assistant Secretary, no component subobjectives were identified, and no milestone dates were established. Because no subobjectives were established, no one was held responsible for carrying them out. Also, there was no process for routinely involving key OSERS managers and staff in the goal-setting process.

Tracking Implementation of OSERS-Wide Goals

Progress in achieving OSERS goals was monitored by the former Assistant Secretary principally through discussions at weekly meetings with top OSERS component officials and managers and by tracking the timeliness of component actions in completing various tasks, such as awarding discretionary grants. OSERS officials told us that components did not provide progress reports, and minutes of the weekly meeting discussions were not maintained to provide the former Assistant Secretary with a record of the OSERS components' progress. Officials told us feedback from OAS to OSERS officials was informal or consisted of weekly memos from OAS officials to alert them of approaching deadlines.

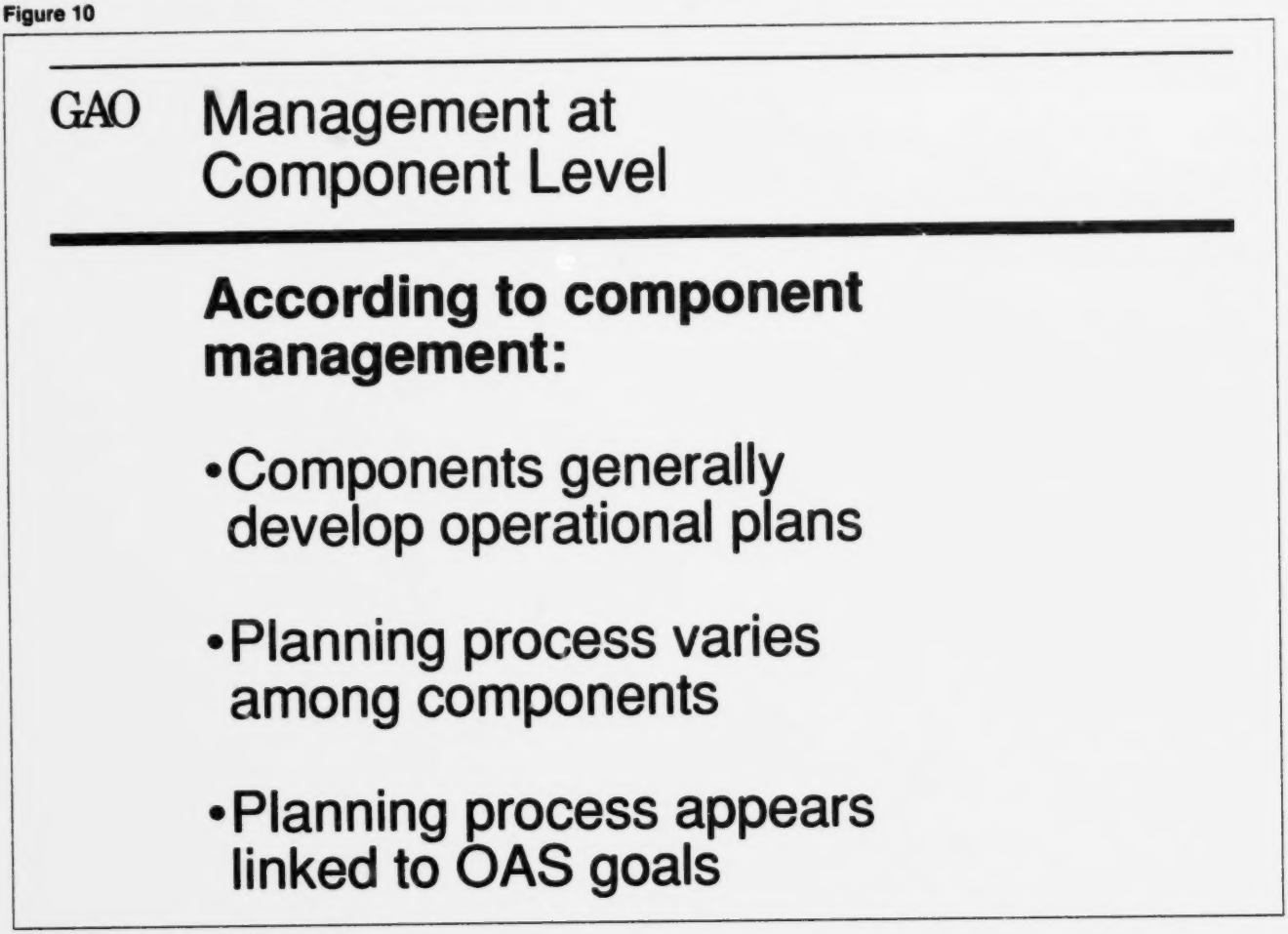
Management at Component Level

In reviewing the management of component organizations, we had trouble measuring their performance because OSERS components do not establish componentwide strategic plans (see p. 3) with measurable objectives that are approved and then monitored by OAS. Instead, each component develops operational plans (see p. 3) that generally are linked to the broad OSERS goals established in the mid-1980s by the former Assistant Secretary. Each OSERS component informally planned its own activities. (See fig. 10.)

Components Lack Strategic Plans

None of the OSERS components developed strategic plans with measurable performance objectives in fiscal year 1989. RSA had strategic plans for fiscal years 1986-88 but did not develop a plan for fiscal year 1989 because of leadership and staffing changes within RSA. Other components' plans we reviewed were operational plans that focused on the annual budget process.

Figure 10



RSA Strategic Planning Initiative

During fiscal years 1986-88, RSA initiated an ambitious planning project that included

- a formal statement of philosophy and three broad goals for RSA;
- an annual operating plan to support those goals, consisting of eight major objectives and numerous subobjectives;
- a designation of RSA officials responsible for implementing each of the eight major objectives; and
- a process for tracking and reporting results.

This conceptually sound process had the essential elements of a successful planning mechanism but was generally unsuccessful because of the lack of staff continuity to execute the plan. For example, during fiscal year 1988 RSA was under the leadership of three different commissioners. In addition, the chief coordinator of RSA's planning activities was reassigned to another OSERS component, and his senior analyst was detailed to a different RSA office.

According to a memorandum on fiscal year 1988 goals prepared by RSA's planning director in December 1988,

"... there were a number of instances where additional progress was hampered by the inability of the decision-making process to respond to questions proposed by the various work groups regarding directions, concerns and positions taken. In addition, the 'leadership' issue probably contributed to the lack of greater success in many of the developmental aspirations that were planned at the beginning of the year."

The acting commissioner of RSA told us in March 1989 that RSA did not have a formal plan for fiscal year 1989 because RSA continued to work toward achieving the goals and objectives established in the 1988 plan.

OSEP Operational Planning Efforts

The Special Education planning process focused on its annual budget process for awarding discretionary grants. The former director of this component told us in February 1989 that planning for OSEP's discretionary grant programs was a 10-month process of setting and revising priorities for awarding such grants to state and local agencies, universities, and other organizations under 12 discretionary grant programs.

Each year the Office of Special Education Programs prepares an internal planning document that describes the purpose, program strategy, and proposed new activities for each of the discretionary grant programs. In some cases, these grants appeared to be linked to the broadly stated goals of the former Assistant Secretary. For example, 1 of OSEP's 12 discretionary grant programs awarded grants to improve the educational services provided to secondary school aged children with handicaps and to assist them in making the transition from school to work.

According to the same former Special Education director, the planning process also involved formula grants. During fiscal year 1988, OSEP awarded $1.7 billion to state education agencies under five formula grant programs. While formula grants accounted for over 90 percent of OSEP's budget, the former director told us this part of OSEP's workload required little planning because the amount of the award was formula driven and monitoring was accomplished according to a 4-year cycle that needed little adjustment. Therefore, the former director believed that a strategic plan with goals and objectives was unnecessary for formula grants.

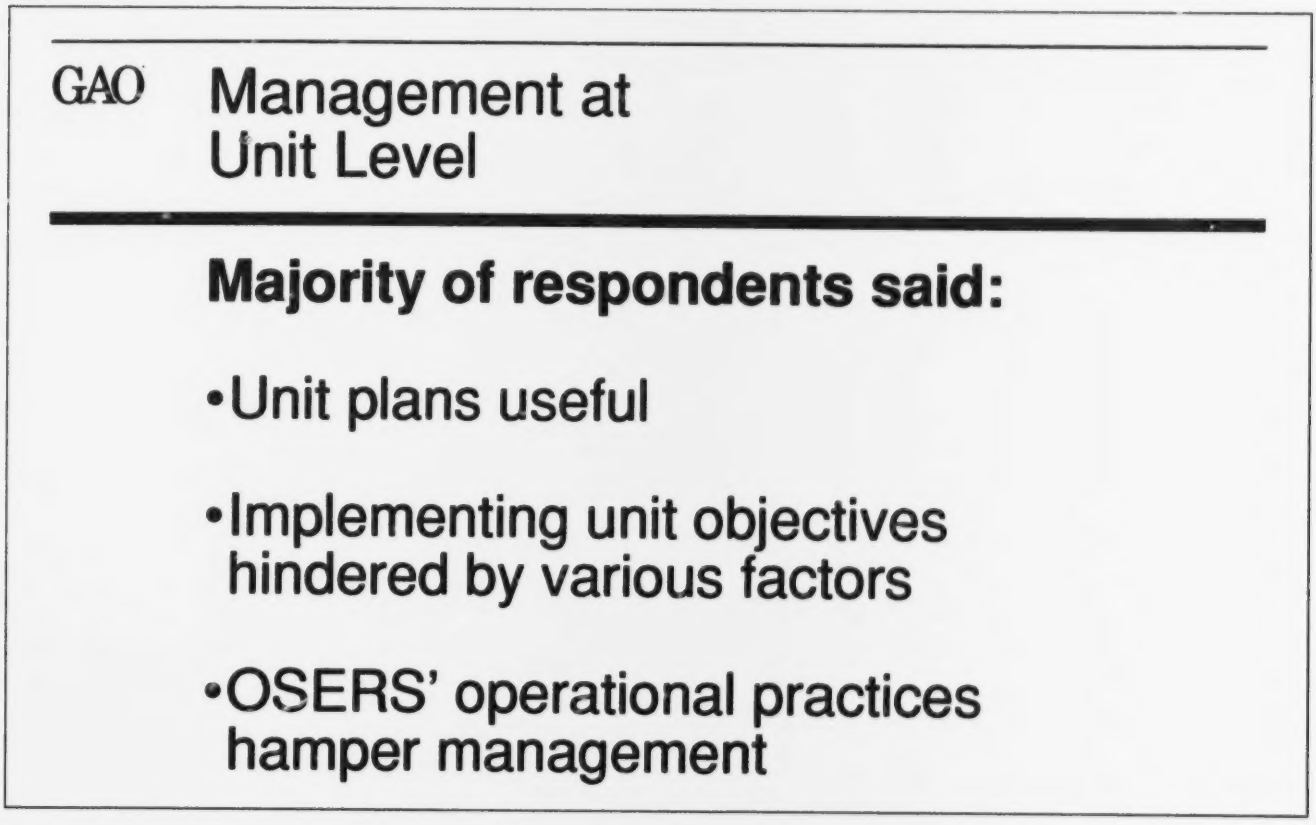
NIDRR Priority Planning Process

NIDRR's planning process concentrates on developing priorities for annually awarding about $50 million in discretionary grants for research, demonstrations, and utilization projects in the rehabilitation field. Despite the lack of a formal plan, NIDRR officials told us they set research priorities after receiving input from disabled persons through workshops, letters, and parent meetings and from NIDRR's constituent groups. Similar to OSEP, no specific measurable component objectives were developed.

Evaluating Component Performance

The lack of an OSERS-wide strategic planning system linking the objectives of its components to the goals of the Assistant Secretary makes it difficult for component heads to track component progress. As a result, we were told by OSERS officials, progress is determined by component heads through (1) regularly scheduled meetings with key staff, (2) personal involvement in component activities, and (3) tracking milestones established by components to see, for example, whether formula and discretionary grants are awarded by predetermined dates.

Figure 11

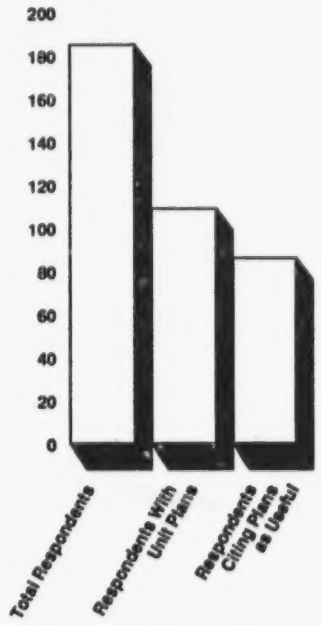


Management at Unit Level Within Components

As shown in figure 11, most questionnaire respondents at the organizational unit level (divisions and branches within OSERS components) said their units had operating plans that helped them to manage their individual programs and activities on a day-to-day basis. These operating plans included such elements as (1) goals and objectives for programs and activities, (2) tasks to be performed, and (3) time frames. However, many of these respondents cited hindrances in implementing their plans. For example, 81 percent of the respondents stated that they believed that OSERS' operational practices, such as the Assistant Secretary's personal involvement in the approval of travel, hampered their ability to properly manage their day-to-day activities.

Figure 12

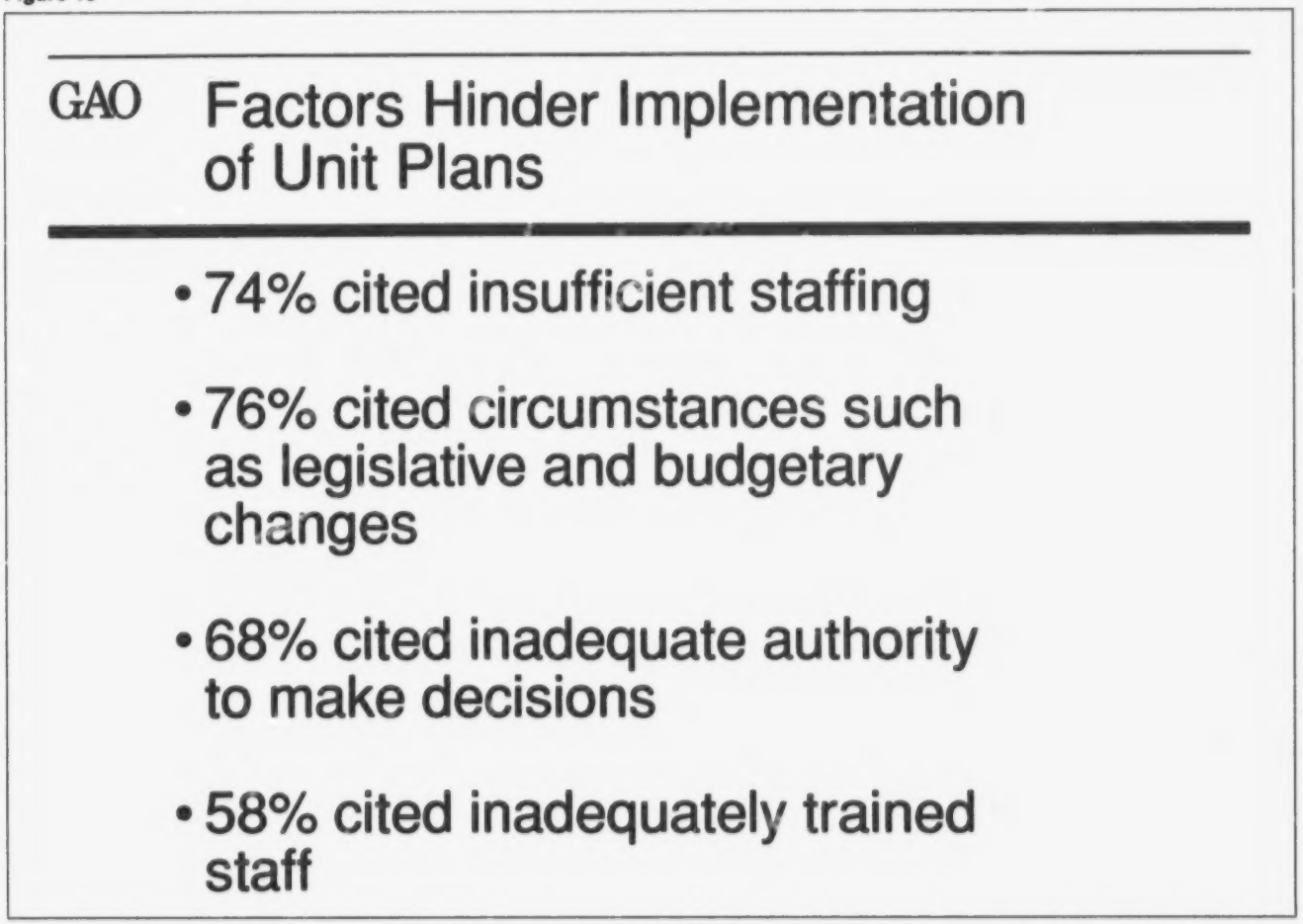
GAO Many Respondents Believed Unit Plans Were Useful



Unit Plans Useful

Almost 60 percent of the respondents stated that they had a written plan or document that described how their programs and activities were to be managed, and 79 percent of those with such a plan said it was at least moderately useful for managing unit activities. (See fig. 12.)

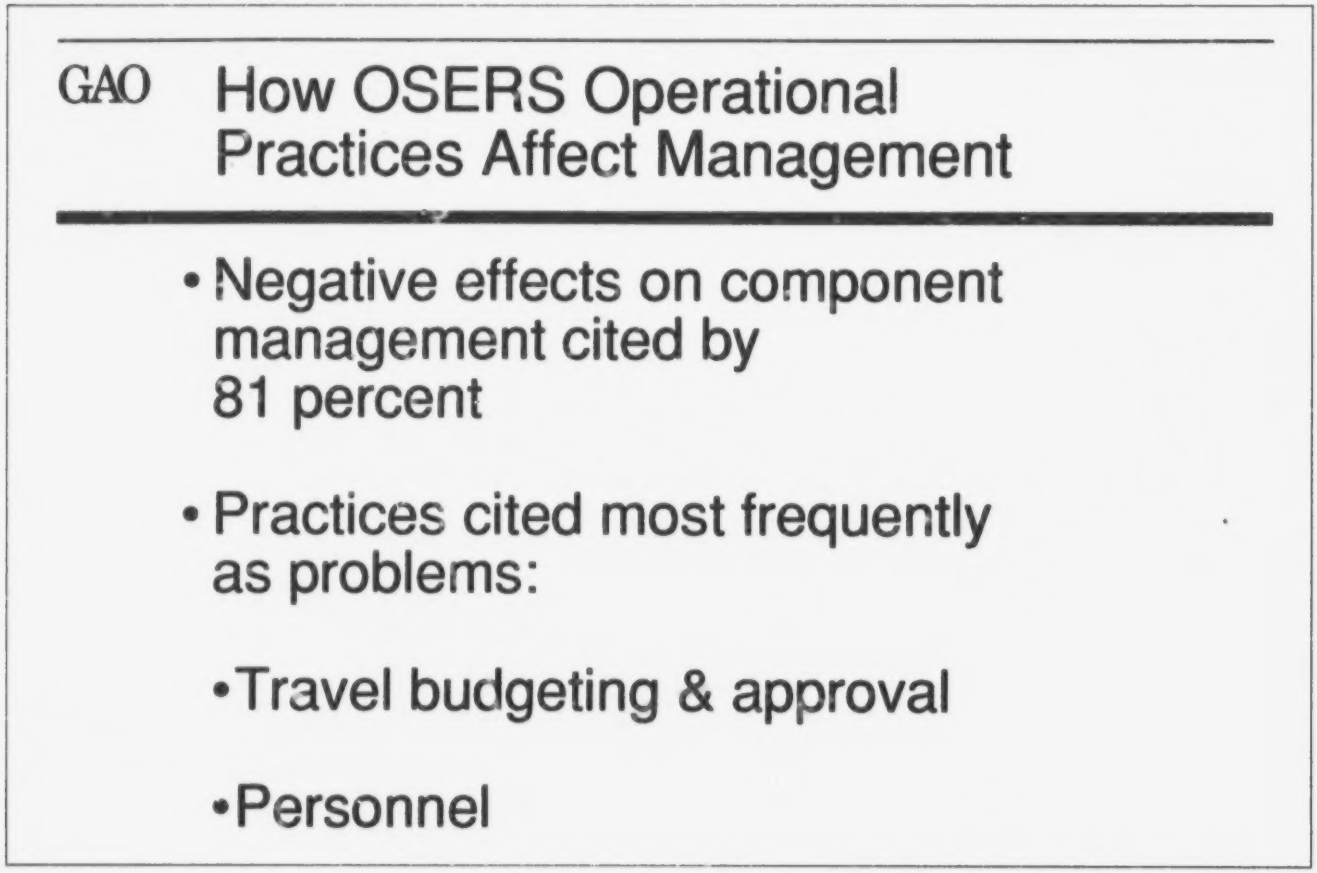
Figure 13


GAO
Factors Hinder Implementation of Unit Plans
• 74% cited insufficient staffing
• 76% cited circumstances such as legislative and budgetary changes
• 68% cited inadequate authority to make decisions
• 58% cited inadequately trained staff

Implementing Unit Objectives Hindered by Various Factors

Of the respondents from units with written plans, 104 said they had some level of involvement in developing the plans, and 82 percent of these respondents were responsible for implementing a portion of their unit plans. Yet of the respondents who were directly involved and responsible for implementing their unit plans, many said they were hindered in their efforts by various factors, as shown in figure 13.

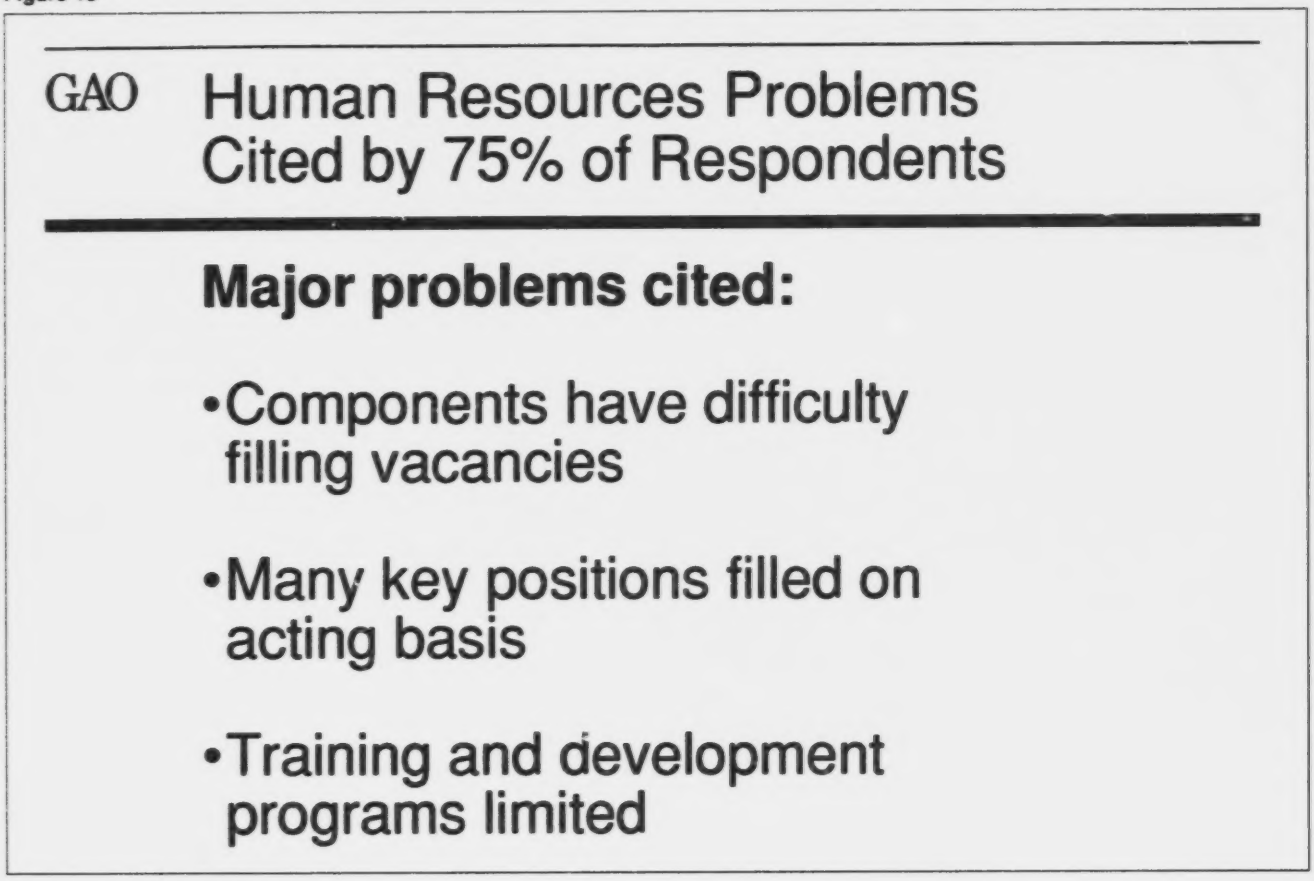
Figure 14


GAO
How OSERS Operational Practices Affect Management
• Negative effects on component management cited by 81 percent
• Practices cited most frequently as problems:
•Travel budgeting & approval
•Personnel

Operational Practices Hamper Performance Management

On a related matter that affects a component's ability to effectively manage its operations, 149 of 183 respondents (81 percent) said OSERS' operational practices had hampered their component's ability to obtain necessary supportive services, such as travel and personnel. Of the negative responses, 98 were classified as very negative. (See fig. 14.)

Figure 15


GAO
Human Resources Problems Cited by 75% of Respondents
Major problems cited:
•Components have difficulty filling vacancies
•Many key positions filled on acting basis
•Training and development programs limited

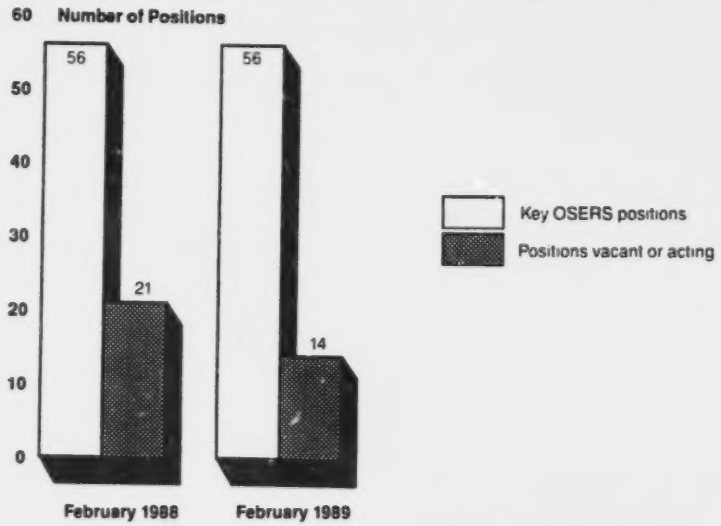
Human Resources Management

In response to our inquiries about personnel matters that may affect their ability to achieve program goals and objectives, over three-quarters of the respondents indicated that staff vacancies, placement of staff in acting positions, and lack of adequate training courses were problem areas. (See fig. 15.) Similar concerns were expressed by state directors of special education and vocational rehabilitation, who said staff vacancies, staff in acting positions, and poorly trained OSERS staff were having a negative impact on their states' ability to achieve program goals.

Figure 16

GAO Key OSERS Positions Vacant or Filled With Acting Personnel

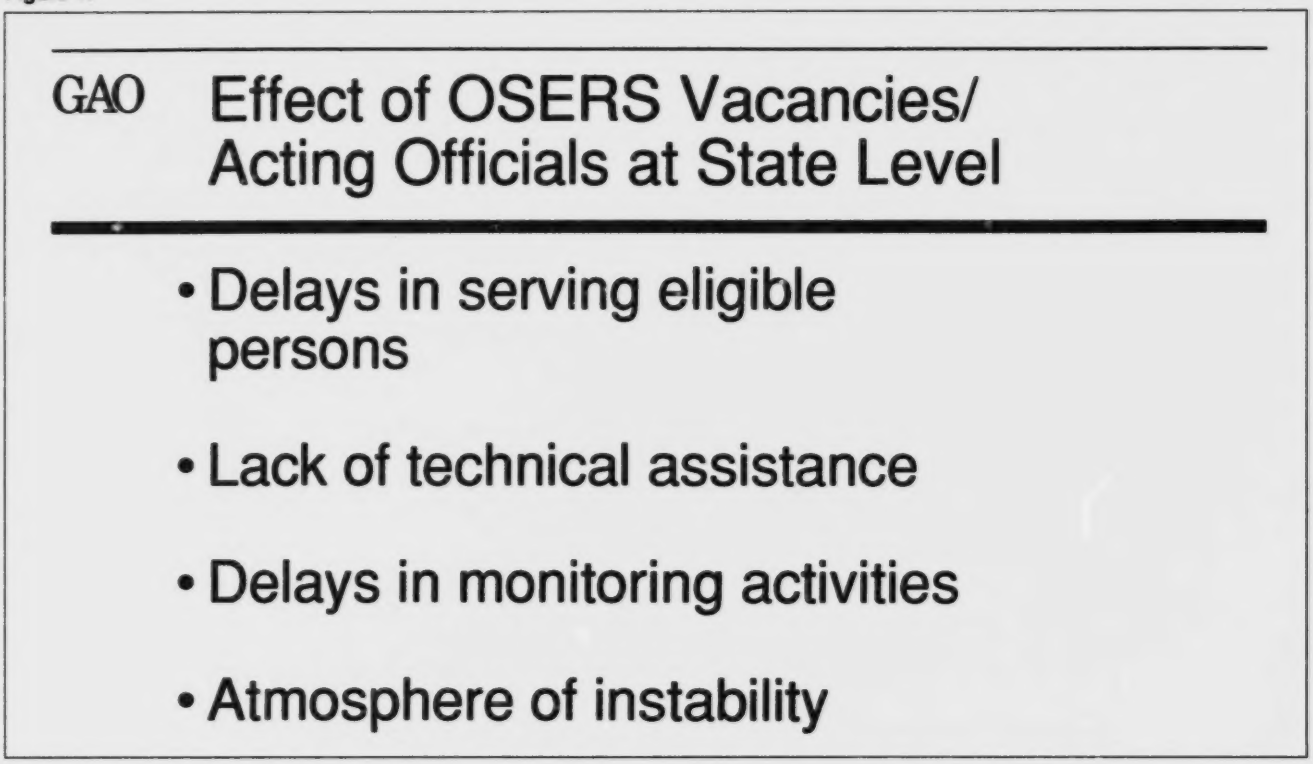
14 of 56 positions remained vacant or filled on acting basis as of February 1989



Staff Vacancies and Acting Managers Create Organizational Problems

OSERS' practice of designating personnel to serve in acting capacities for long periods of time generally created an environment in which important decisions on such matters as approval of state plans and levels of program funding were delayed. This situation also gave staff no incentive to engage in long-term planning or to start new program initiatives. Information we developed indicated that 21 of 56 key OSERS positions (component heads, division directors, regional commissioners, and branch managers) were vacant or being filled on an acting basis as of

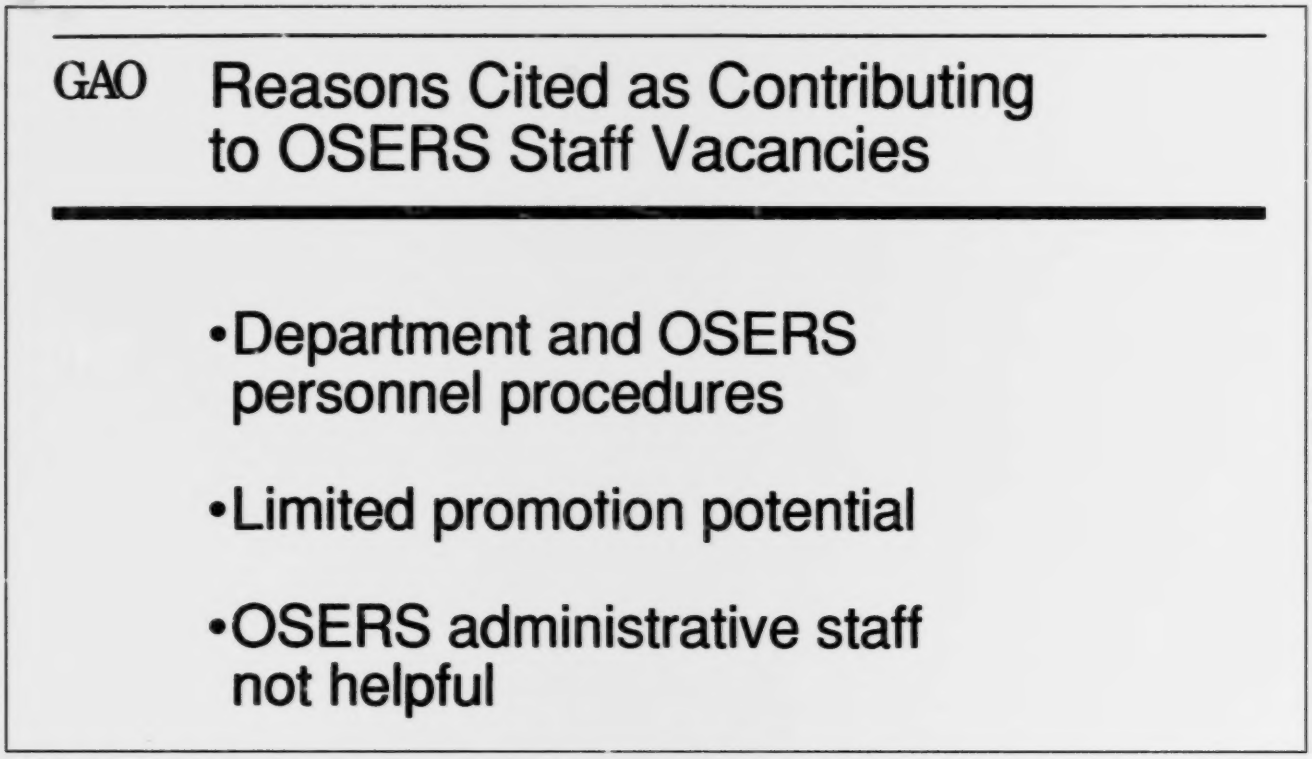
Figure 17


GAO
Effect of OSERS Vacancies/ Acting Officials at State Level
• Delays in serving eligible persons
• Lack of technical assistance
• Delays in monitoring activities
• Atmosphere of instability

February 1988. At that time, two regional RSA commissioner positions had been vacant for over a year. Information obtained from OSERS as of February 1989 indicated that some improvement had been made, but 14 of these 56 positions were still vacant or filled with acting managers, as shown in figure 16.

The majority of state directors for rehabilitative services (37) and state directors for special education (31) told us that having vacant managerial positions and staff functioning in an acting capacity in OSERS were having a significant effect on their programs at the state level. Some examples included states' inability to get technical assistance and advice on such programs as independent living, delays in OSEP's monitoring activities, and OSERS approval of state plans causing disruptions at the state level and generally creating an unstable atmosphere. (See fig. 17.)

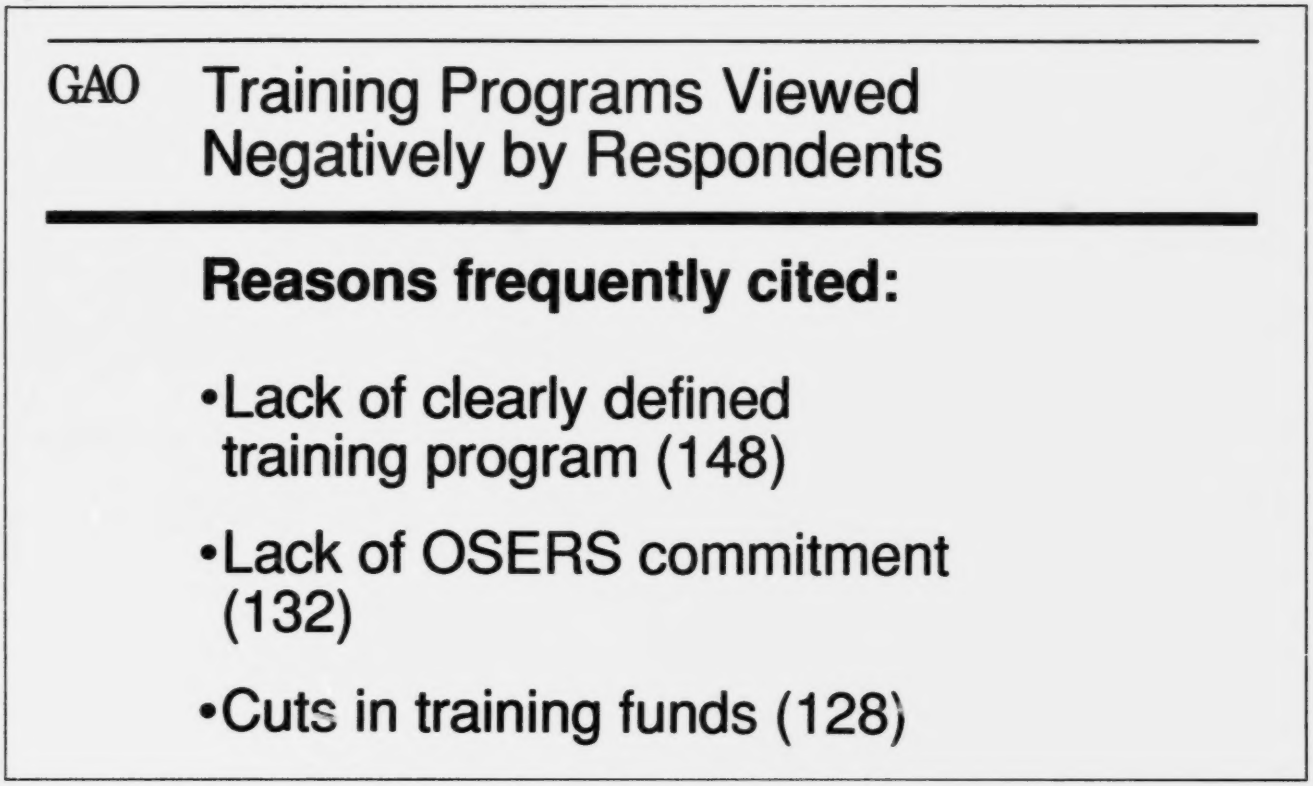
Figure 18


GAO
Reasons Cited as Contributing to OSERS Staff Vacancies
•Department and OSERS personnel procedures
•Limited promotion potential
•OSERS administrative staff not helpful

Eighty-four percent of the questionnaire respondents identified staff vacancies as a problem, and 55 percent said that their component could seldom fill critical vacancies when they occurred. As shown in figure 18, the reasons mentioned most frequently as contributing to this situation were: certain Department and OSERS procedures, such as no payment for relocation expenses of new employees; limited promotion potential of advertised positions; and the uncooperative attitude of OSERS' administrative staff responsible for filling vacant positions. It is important to note, however, that problems such as the limited promotion potential of certain positions could occur in any government department, agency, or office.

Most respondents said the employee turnover rate for managers and senior staff was too high. They indicated that the turnover rate has decreased the number of qualified staff in their units, OSERS efficiency

Figure 19


GAO
Training Programs Viewed Negatively by Respondents
Reasons frequently cited:
•Lack of clearly defined training program (148)
•Lack of OSERS commitment (132)
•Cuts in training funds (128)

and effectiveness, and employee morale. OSERS maintained no data on turnover rates for its managers and senior staff.

Ineffective Training and Development Programs

Training and development programs generally were viewed negatively. Fewer than one in six respondents believed that Department-sponsored internal training and development programs had been effective in improving their performance. The conditions cited most frequently by the respondents as detracting from the effectiveness of these programs are shown in figure 19.

In discussions of this issue with OSERS component heads, division directors, and branch chiefs, we were told that any OSERS employee who desires an individual training plan can have one prepared. However, the training courses available through the Department's Horace Mann Learning Center in Washington, D.C., include managerial and administrative courses only. The center does not offer training in specialized subject matter related to special education or vocational rehabilitation issues, which employees say they want and need in order to keep current in their profession.

Several division directors and branch chiefs told us that OAS would not approve travel to attend out-of-town seminars and conferences to obtain such specialized training because of budget restrictions. In addition, OSERS' regional staff could not attend courses at the Horace Mann Learning Center because OSERS funds were not available to pay their travel costs or per diem expenses.

Further, OSERS officials told us that although RSA awards grants to states for staff development, their regional staff were unable to attend any of these programs or courses because of budget restrictions on travel. In effect, OSERS mid-level managers stated that training and development opportunities for headquarters and OSERS regional staff were very limited.

Grants Management

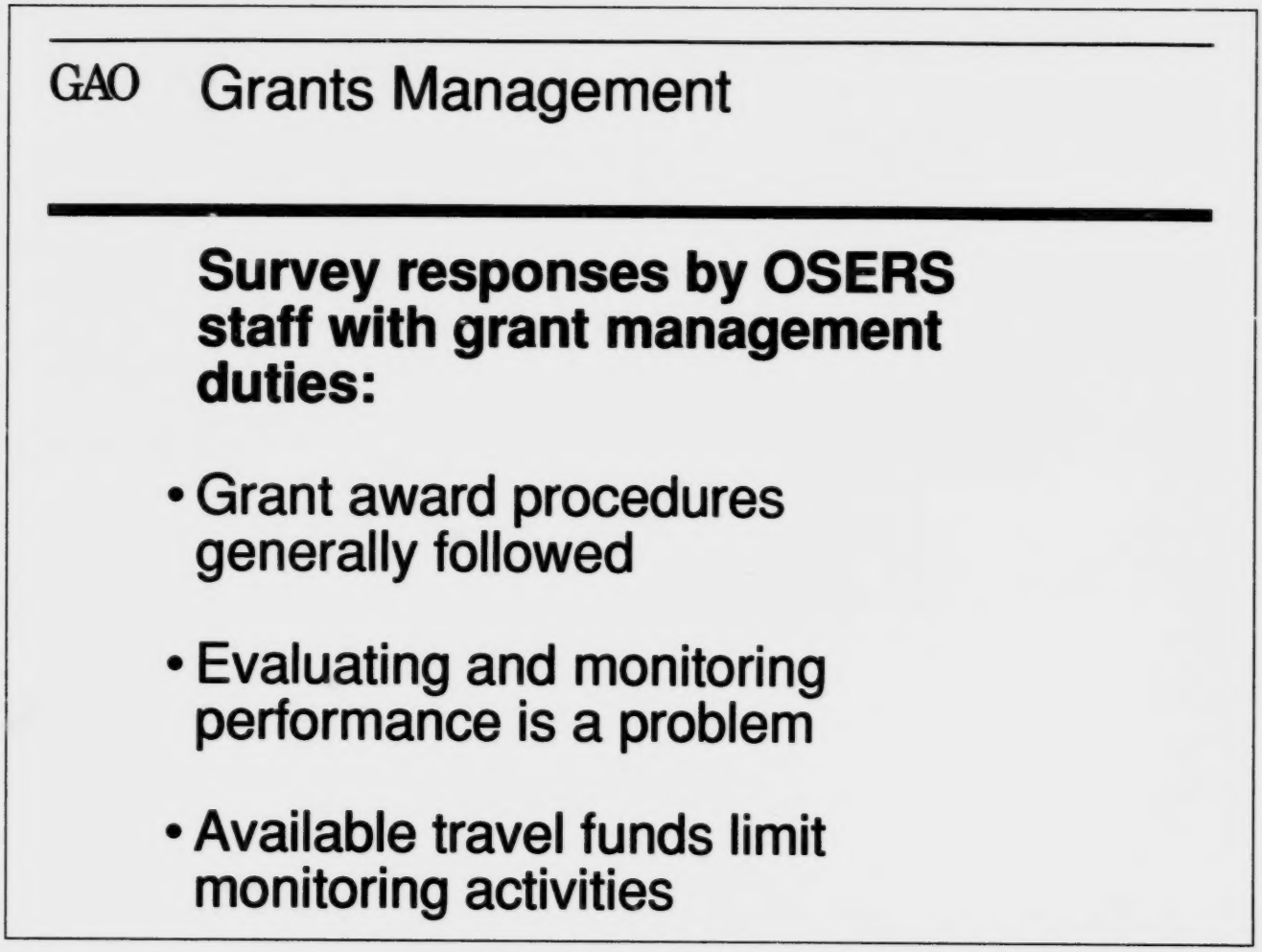
OSERS' primary mission is to award and administer discretionary and formula grants to states and organizational entities that provide special education programs and vocational rehabilitation services to disabled persons. These activities comprise virtually all of OSERS' budget. Nevertheless, questionnaire respondents with grant responsibilities believed there are serious problems in evaluating and monitoring discretionary and formula grant performance due to limited staff and the unavailability of travel funds. (See fig. 20.)

Grant Procedures Generally Followed

The Department has written procedures for managing grants and contracts. Sixty-nine percent of respondents with grant responsibilities indicated that their organizational units follow these written procedures for selecting field readers[1] to review proposals. Seventy-seven percent of

[1]Persons selected by the Department to review grant applications from a roster of qualified and willing individuals.

Figure 20

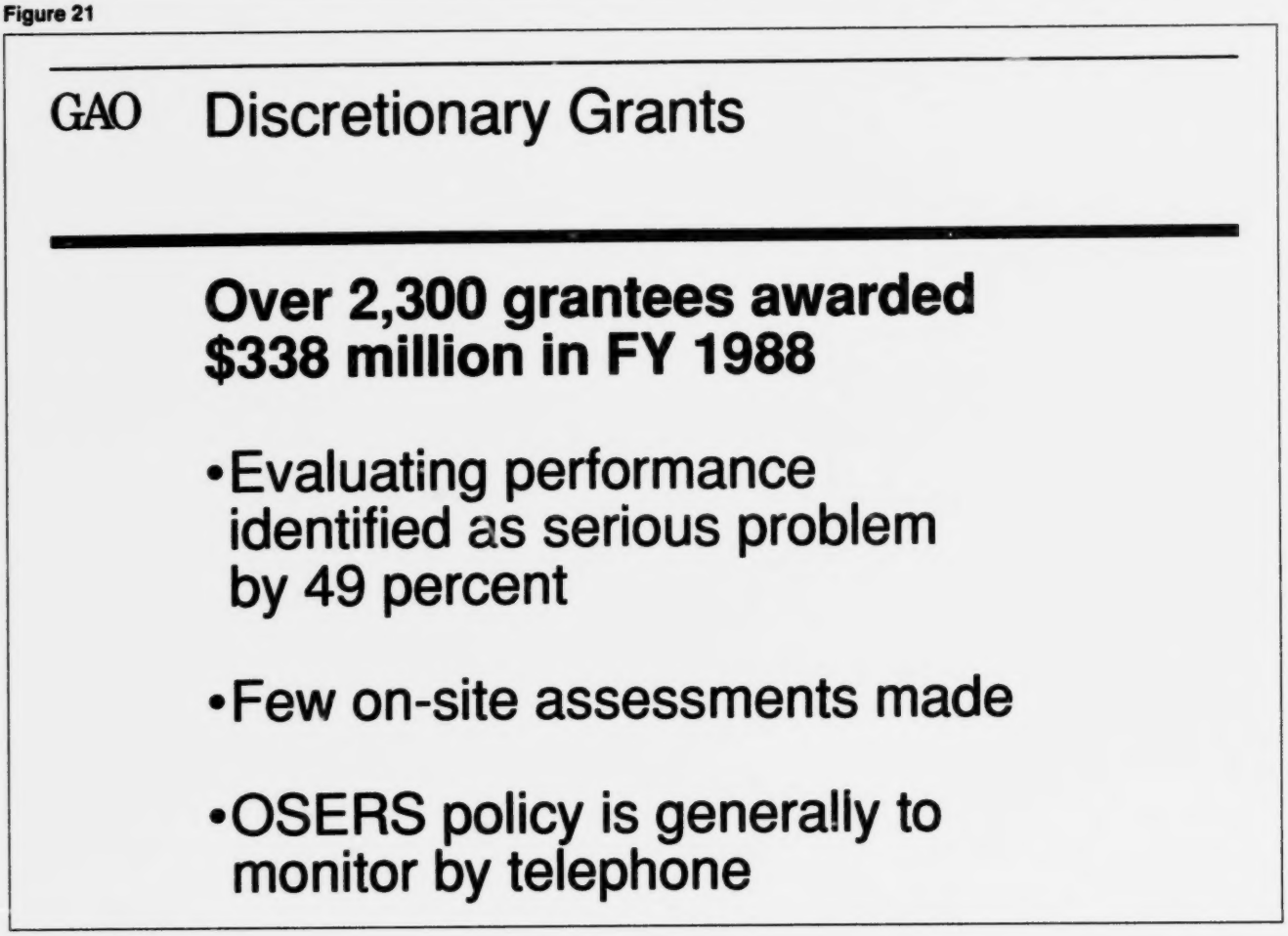

GAO Grants Management
Survey responses by OSERS staff with grant management duties:
• Grant award procedures generally followed
• Evaluating and monitoring performance is a problem
• Available travel funds limit monitoring activities

respondents said that their organizational units follow appropriate procedures for awarding and administering grants and contracts.

Evaluating and Monitoring Grant Performance Is a Problem

Evaluating discretionary grantee performance and monitoring formula grants were identified by OSERS senior staff and managers as serious problem areas. OSERS managers believed the primary cause of the problem was the limited staff and travel funds available to evaluate and monitor over 2,400 discretionary and formula grants.

Figure 21


GAO Discretionary Grants
Over 2,300 grantees awarded $338 million in FY 1988
•Evaluating performance identified as serious problem by 49 percent
•Few on-site assessments made
•OSERS policy is generally to monitor by telephone

Discretionary Grants

During fiscal year 1988, OSERS awarded 2,366 discretionary grants totaling $338 million, as noted in figure 21. Telephone discussions were the most common method used for monitoring grants, according to the former OSEP director and 88 percent of 128 OSERS respondents. On-site visits were occasionally conducted. Information provided by OSERS officials

Figure 22

GAO Discretionary Grant On-Site Visits Seldom Made

Component	Dollars in Millions	Number of Grants	On-Site Visits	Percent of Grantees Visited
RSA	$118	790	78	10
OSEP	169	1367	21	2
NIDRR	51	209	10	5
Total	**$338**	**2366**	**109**	**5**

indicated that on-site monitoring visits were conducted for about 5 percent of their discretionary grants during fiscal year 1988, as shown in figure 22. According to our questionnaire results, 26 of 80 respondents said that the frequency of discretionary grant on-site visits was 5 or more years. In addition, 21 respondents reported that some discretionary grants were never monitored on-site (see fig. 23).

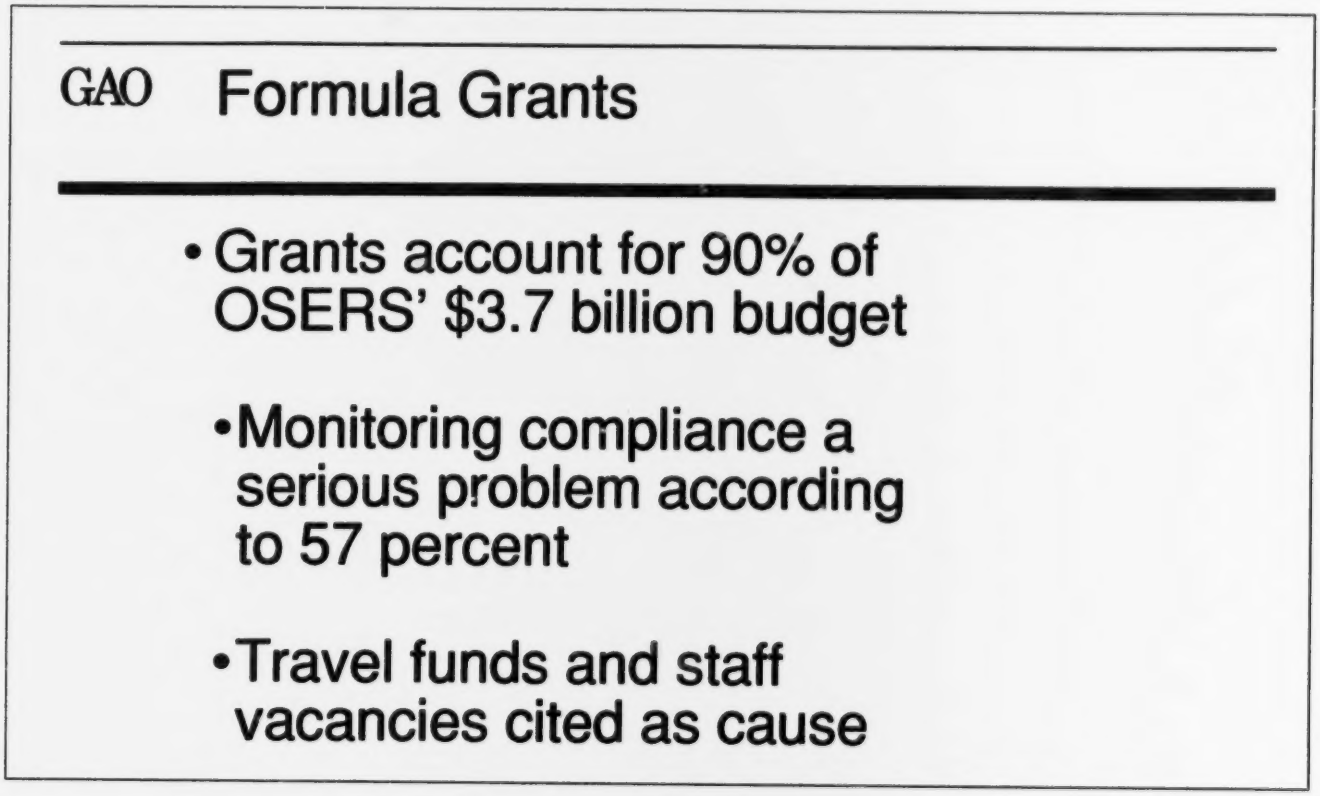
Figure 23

GAO Frequency Varies in Monitoring Discretionary Grantees

Frequency	Number of Respondents
Every year	6
Every 2 years	13
Every 3 years	6
Every 4 years	4
Five years or more	26
Never	21
Other	4

Evaluating grant performance was identified by 58 of 119 respondents as a serious problem in the discretionary grant cycle. Many respondents said telephone monitoring was used in place of on-site visits because of OSERS' limited travel budget. The disadvantage to relying on telephone monitoring is the lack of on-site verification of grantee performance.

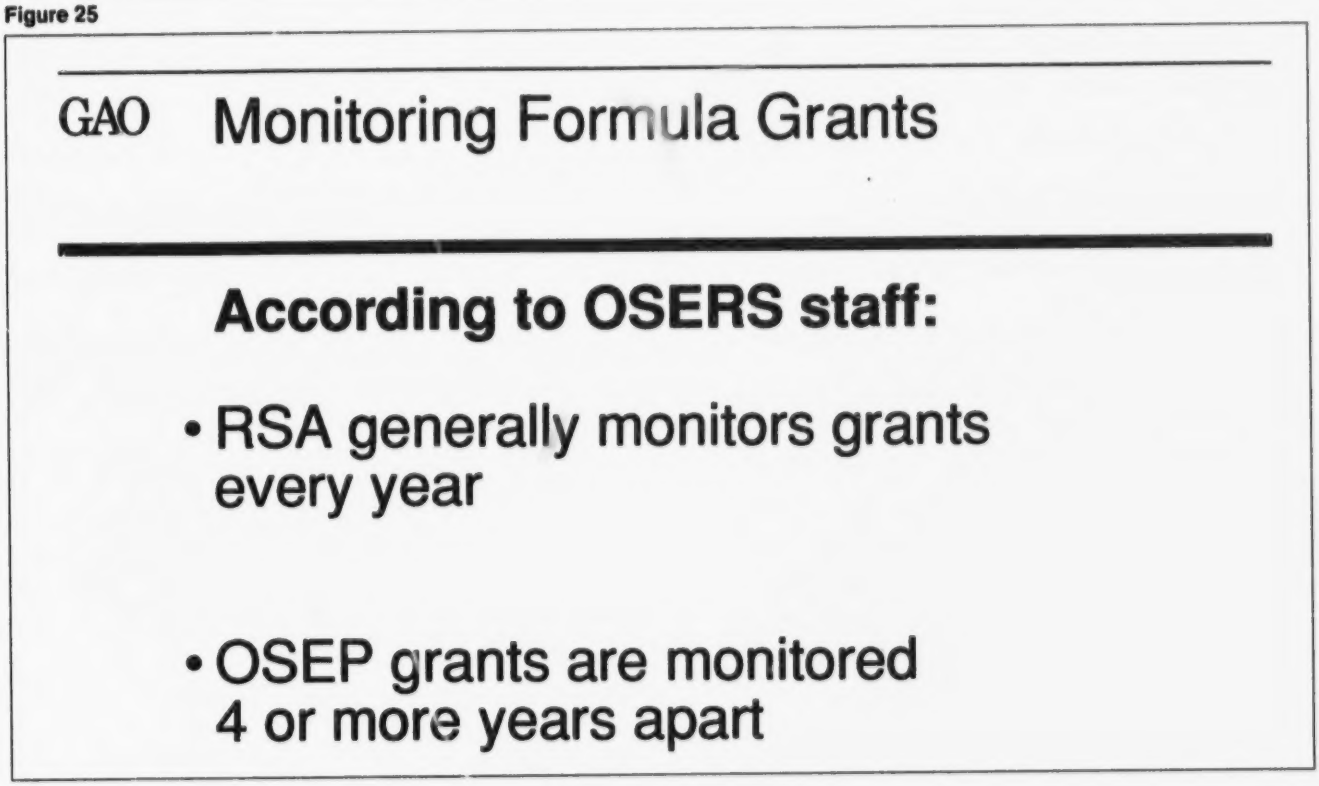
Figure 24


GAO
Formula Grants
• Grants account for 90% of OSERS' $3.7 billion budget
• Monitoring compliance a serious problem according to 57 percent
• Travel funds and staff vacancies cited as cause

Formula Grants

About 90 percent of OSERS' $3.7 billion fiscal year 1989 appropriation was devoted to formula grants. Of the 85 respondents with formula grant responsibility, 40 identified monitoring compliance as the most serious problem in the formula grant cycle. However, the problem seemed to be more prevalent in OSEP than in RSA. NIDRR does not administer formula grants. Similar to discretionary grants, insufficient travel funds and staff vacancies were cited by many respondents as the primary cause of this problem. (See fig. 24.)

Figure 25


GAO Monitoring Formula Grants
According to OSERS staff:
• RSA generally monitors grants every year
• OSEP grants are monitored 4 or more years apart

OSEP awarded $1.7 billion to state education agencies under five formula grant programs during fiscal year 1989. RSA awarded $1.4 billion in state formula grants to state vocational rehabilitation and blind agencies during the same period. The former OSEP director stated that Special Education's formula grants are monitored on-site according to a specific monitoring cycle. Thirty-three of 83 respondents indicated that their organizational unit's formula grants were generally monitored on-site every year. Thirty-two of these 33 responses came from RSA. (See fig. 25.)

Seventeen of 20 respondents reported that visits to OSEP formula grant recipients are 4 or more years apart. The former Special Education director told us that formula grant recipients are visited on a 4-year cycle. Information provided to us by OSERS officials showed that 13 of 51 state education agencies were not visited on-site during fiscal years 1985 through 1988.

Reports are prepared and issued to grantees after monitoring visits are completed, according to OSERS officials. It generally takes 90 days or less to prepare and issue monitoring reports, 50 of 74 respondents indicated. However, the time required to prepare and issue a monitoring report varied significantly between OSEP and RSA and appeared unreasonable within OSEP. For example, 11 of the 14 OSEP respondents indicated that it took from 1 to 3 years to prepare and issue final monitoring reports.

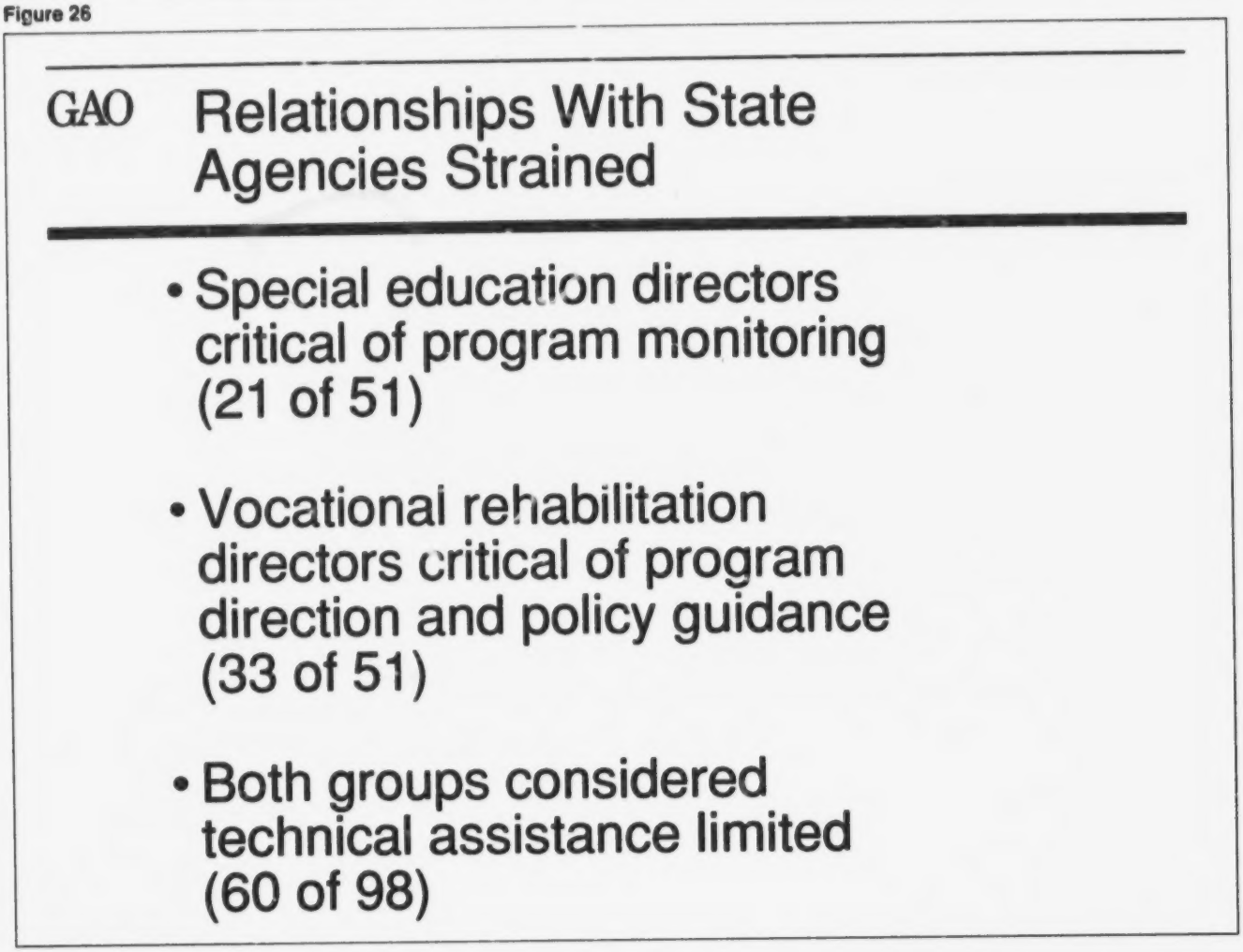
Information provided by OSERS officials indicated that 9 of 11 state special education agencies visited by OSEP during fiscal year 1987 had not received final monitoring reports as of February 1989 (see app. I). According to questionnaire respondents, the delays were attributed to slow departmental clearances and limited staff.

This information is generally consistent with that we received from our telephone survey of state special education directors. They said that not receiving formal monitoring feedback was one of their most critical problems in their relationship with OSEP. Their comments indicate that OSEP was not supportive of their states' need for responsive and timely feedback. Of the 51 state directors, 22 said it sometimes takes 18 months or longer to receive a final monitoring report from OSEP. For example:

- California had a monitoring visit in September 1985, but did not receive its final report until April 1988.
- Arizona was monitored in March 1984 and received a preliminary report in April 1988. As of February 1989, Arizona had not received its final report, but was revisited in June 1988.

The Congress and state special education directors have been critical of OSEP's monitoring activities for the past several years. Recognizing that greater attention must be devoted to improving its monitoring process, OSEP is collaborating with the Department's federal regional resource center, operated under contract to the University of Kentucky Research Foundation, to recommend improvements in the monitoring process.

Figure 26


GAO
Relationships With State Agencies Strained
• Special education directors critical of program monitoring (21 of 51)
• Vocational rehabilitation directors critical of program direction and policy guidance (33 of 51)
• Both groups considered technical assistance limited (60 of 98)

Federal/State Relationships

State directors of special education and vocational rehabilitation agencies identified several problems regarding their states' relationship with OSERS. Program monitoring by OSEP was the primary activity that troubled most special education directors. Many said that their state formula grants had not been evaluated in 2 or more years and that it generally took about 18 months to receive a final monitoring report. Most state vocational rehabilitation directors' comments regarding OSERS management were negative. They were critical of OSERS program direction, policy guidance, and particularly RSA's technical assistance. (See fig. 26.)

Figure 27

GAO How Well Has OAS Established Program Goals and Objectives?

	Number of Special Education State Directors	Number of Vocational Rehabilitation State Directors
Very well	9	2
Well	24	5
Neither well nor poorly	10	11
Poorly	6	18
Very poorly	1	15
No basis to judge	1	0
Total number of respondents	**51**	**51**

Program Direction and Policy Guidance

State officials had mixed views regarding the establishment of OSERS goals. The majority of state special education directors (33 of 51) were pleased with the goals established by the former Assistant Secretary for persons with handicapping conditions. However, the same number of state vocational rehabilitation directors told us that OAS had done a poor job of establishing national goals and objectives for handicapped persons. (See fig. 27.) According to many vocational rehabilitation

directors, their expertise and comments had been disregarded in setting goals for RSA. In addition, 80 percent of the state vocational rehabilitation directors stated that the partnership between their state agencies and RSA headquarters officials had deteriorated or ceased to exist. RSA regional offices, on the other hand, generally were viewed favorably by state vocational rehabilitation directors.

Written federal policy guidance provided to the states by OSEP and RSA was generally characterized as moderately useful but untimely. Of 51 state special education directors, 33 told us that the written policy guidance received from OSEP was untimely. Similarly, 43 of 51 state vocational rehabilitation directors said RSA's policy guidance was untimely. RSA's policy manual, for example, has gone without a major revision for 14 years. In addition, OAS made policy decisions without obtaining needed input from state agencies, in the opinion of many state directors. While considered moderately useful, written policy guidance from OSEP and RSA also was specifically characterized by many state directors as sporadic, incidental, and outdated. Several state directors said that this caused, among other things, problems in trying to determine who was eligible to receive services.

Technical Assistance

Both state vocational rehabilitation and state special education directors were critical of OSERS technical assistance efforts. Many state vocational rehabilitation directors said the on-site technical assistance provided by RSA was very limited. For example:

- Sixty-three percent said RSA staff generally were unaware of the kinds of rehabilitation services needed in their state.
- Forty-five percent believed that this lack of expertise results from RSA staff being inexperienced and improperly trained.
- Fifty-five percent believed the RSA staff's lack of expertise has had a negative effect on their ability to achieve their state program goals because they frequently cannot get program guidance and needed technical assistance.

As shown in figure 28, many state vocational rehabilitation directors also said that on-site technical assistance provided by RSA staff was ineffective. Although requests for technical assistance continued to be made, OAS frequently denied on-site technical assistance. Several state vocational rehabilitation directors said that RSA regional office staff were not allowed to travel for the purpose of providing technical

Figure 28

GAO RSA Technical Assistance

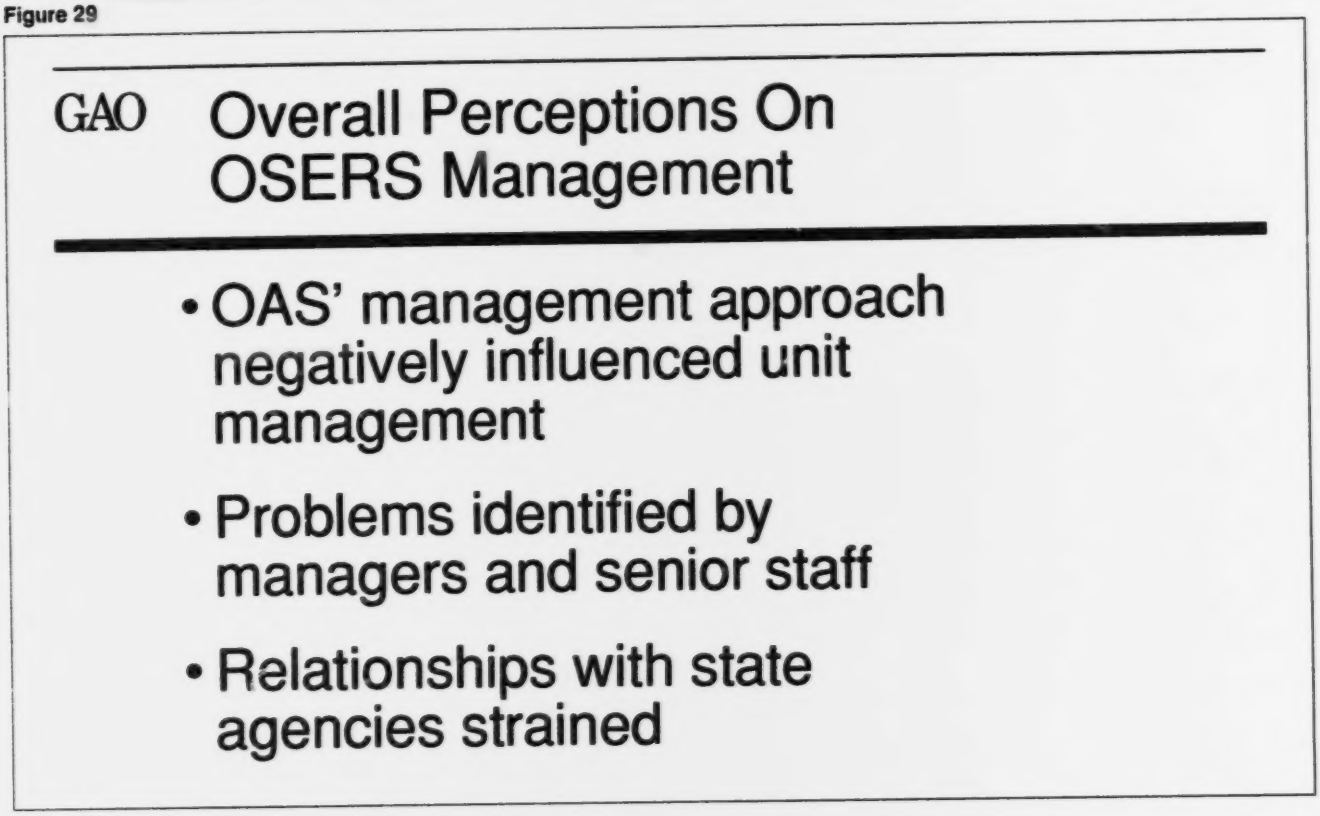
Ineffective, according to many vocational rehabilitation directors

Level of Effectiveness	Number of Respondents
Very effective	3
Effective	10
Neither effective nor ineffective	12
Not effective	23
Do not know	1
No basis to judge	2

assistance to the state agencies, even when states offered to pay for travel expenses. As a result, some states believed that OSERS has a policy against providing technical assistance to states. Within the 3-year period 1986-88, 32 vocational rehabilitation directors told us that OAS had denied on-site technical assistance. In addition, another 10 state directors told us they did not even bother to request such assistance because they knew it would be denied.

In commenting on the quality of OSEP staff, 57 percent of the 51 state special education directors indicated that OSEP staff generally was not knowledgeable about the special education program needs in their state. In addition, 80 percent of the directors said that their states had not received any on-site technical assistance from OSEP over the last 3 years.

Figure 29

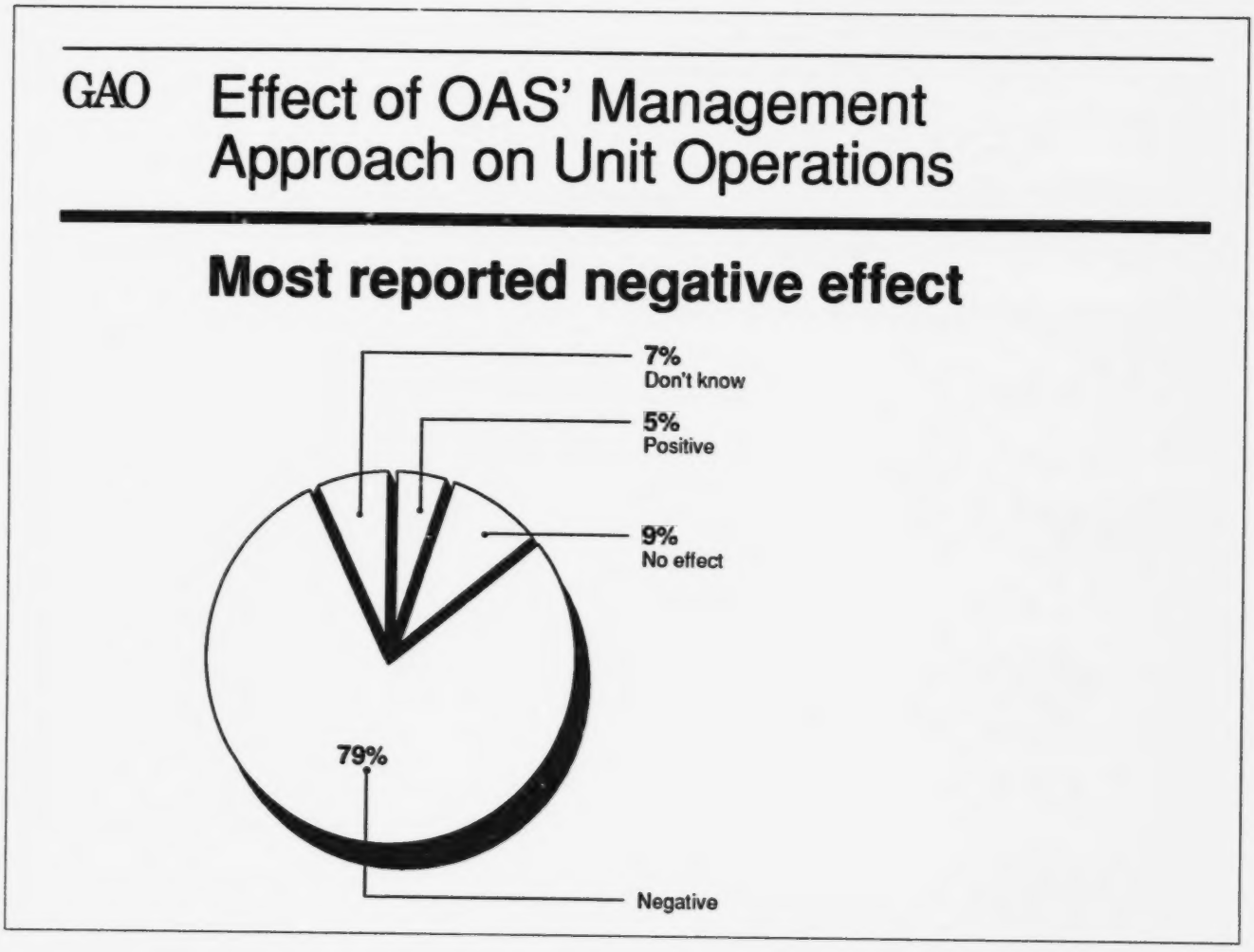

GAO
Overall Perceptions On OSERS Management
• OAS' management approach negatively influenced unit management
• Problems identified by managers and senior staff
• Relationships with state agencies strained

The former Special Education director told us his travel budget was not used for technical assistance visits because such trips were supposed to be performed by staff from the Department's Regional Resource Centers. It was OSERS policy for headquarters personnel to limit their technical assistance to sending copies of pertinent information to state officials.

Overall Perceptions on OSERS Management

Over three-quarters of OSERS managers and senior staff believed that the overall management approach within OSERS had a negative effect on the day-to-day operations of their organizational units. A primary reason for these negative feelings was the perceived excessive involvement of OAS in component activities. These feelings were expressed in questionnaires completed by substantial numbers of managers and senior staff in all three OSERS components. (See fig. 29.)

Figure 30



Overall Management Approach

According to 79 percent of OSERS managers and senior staff responding to our questionnaire, the former Assistant Secretary's overall management approach negatively influenced the management of their organizational units. (See fig. 30.) Over half of these officials indicated that the

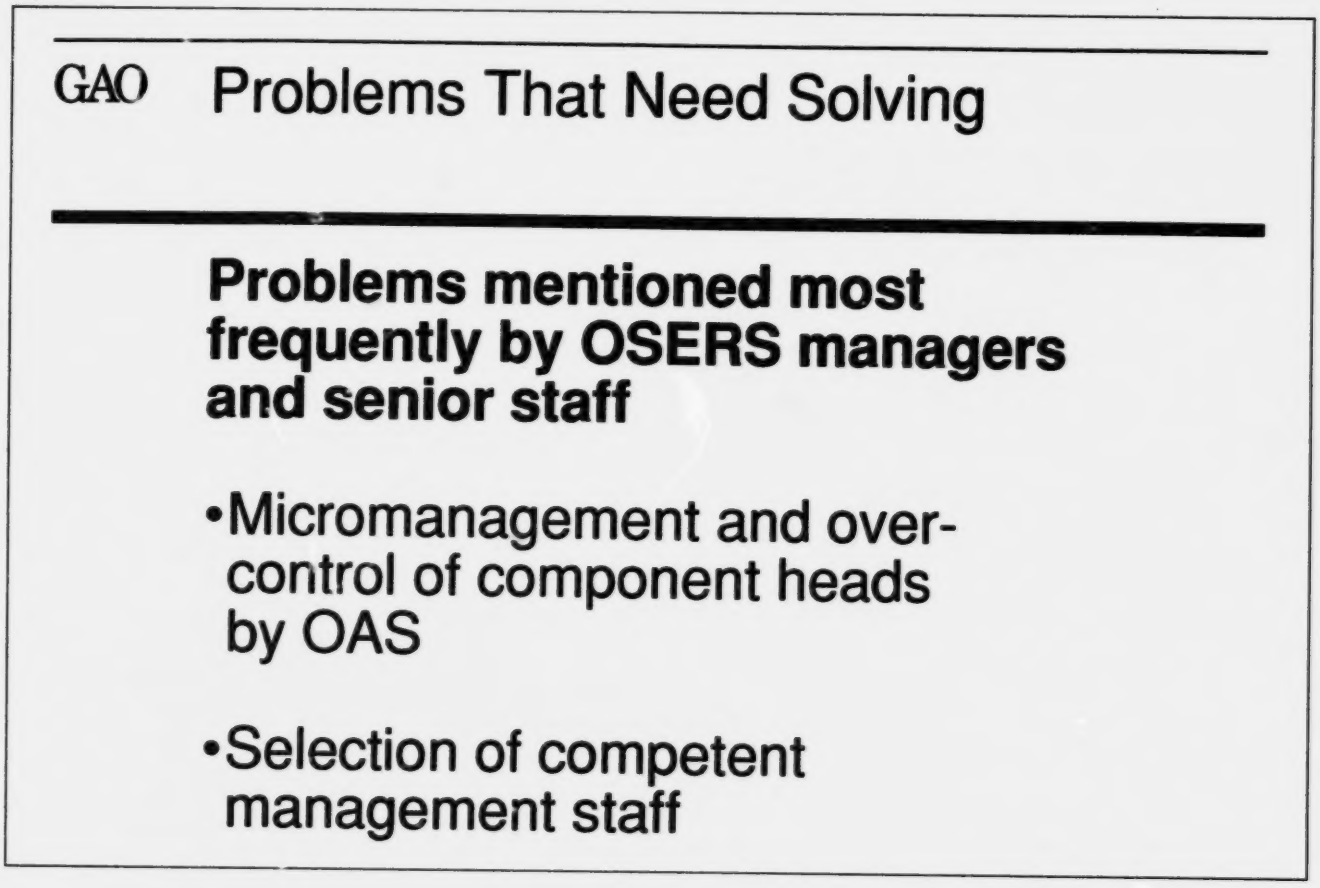
former Assistant Secretary's overall management approach had a very negative effect on their unit operations. Specific explanations cited by respondents included (1) too much intervention and micromanagement in component activities, (2) lack of professional respect toward the staff, and (3) failure to support RSA goals. Nine of 184 respondents (5 percent) indicated that the former Assistant Secretary's overall management approach had a positive effect on their units' daily management.

Problems Identified by OSERS Managers and Senior Staff

One hundred and sixty OSERS managers and senior staff identified one or two problems that adversely affected their units. In the responses we reviewed, poor management practices and what they often referred to as "micromanagement" were mentioned most frequently. The most common practice cited as poor management was the filling of top management positions with "acting managers" or allowing positions to remain vacant for extended periods.

Restrictions on travel were often cited by respondents regarding micromanagement. Similar findings also were identified by the Department's Management Improvement Service (MIS). In its October 1987 report, MIS discussed travel limitations on RSA regional offices. MIS reported that one of the greatest irritants to both regional commissioners and regional staff was the lack of travel funds that would enable them to provide more comprehensive monitoring and assistance to grantees. MIS made several recommendations to OSERS management, including one that OAS allocate a travel budget to each RSA regional commissioner to independently manage employee travel within the region's prescribed budget. While OSERS provided no formal response to the MIS report, OAS proposed a revision to its travel policy with respect to RSA's regional offices in a February 9, 1989, memorandum. The proposal would authorize the regional commissioner rather than OAS to approve all travel orders and vouchers for subordinate staff. As of August 1, 1989, no final action had been taken on this proposal.

Figure 31


GAO
Problems That Need Solving
Problems mentioned most frequently by OSERS managers and senior staff
•Micromanagement and over-control of component heads by OAS
•Selection of competent management staff

The two most frequent areas requiring OSERS' top management attention, according to questionnaire respondents, were micromanagement and staff competencies. (See fig. 31.) Respondents' comments were consistent with information we obtained throughout the questionnaire. Most respondents generally agreed that OAS was too involved in component activities, such as setting policies, allocating resources, program management, and particularly administrative operations. Other problems receiving frequent mention were the former Assistant Secretary's perceived lack of respect for staff and infrequent recognition of employees' abilities, poor leadership, ineffective organizational structure, and a need for better communication and cooperation between OAS and the three OSERS components.

Agency Comments

We received written comments on our report from the Department of Education's new Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. The Department generally agreed with our findings and said it was planning actions to address the management concerns identified. The Assistant Secretary said his new management team considers returning sound management practices and improved morale to OSERS as one of its highest priorities. The Department's September 5, 1989, letter is presented in appendix VI.

OSEP's Formula Grant Monitoring Visits to the 50 States and District of Columbia (Fiscal Years 1985-88)

State	Year onsite visit conducted	Year final report issued	Year corrective action plan received
Alabama	1987	Not issued	-
Alaska	1987	Not issued	-
Arizona	1988	Not issued	-
Arkansas	1986	1987	1988
California	1985	1988	1988
Colorado	1987	Not issued	-
Connecticut	-	-	-
Delaware	-	-	-
District of Columbia	1988	Not issued	-
Florida	1987	1988	-
Georgia	1986	1988	1988
Hawaii	1985	1987	1987
Idaho	-	-	-
Illinois	-	-	-
Indiana	1986	1988	1988
Iowa	1988	Not issued	-
Kansas	1986	1988	1988
Kentucky	1985	1987	1987
Louisiana	1985	1987	1987
Maine	1987	Not issued	-
Maryland	1986	Not issued	-
Massachusetts	1986	1987	1988
Michigan	1988	Not issued	-
Minnesota	1985	1987	1987
Mississippi	1987	Not issued	-
Missouri	1988	Not issued	-
Montana	-	-	-
Nebraska	1987	Not issued	-
Nevada	1986	1988	1988
New Hampshire	-	-	-
New Jersey	1987	Not issued	-
New Mexico	1988	Not issued	-
New York	-	-	-
North Carolina	-	-	-
North Dakota	-	-	-
Ohio	1986	1987	1988
Oklahoma	1986	1987	1988
Oregon	1987	1988	-
Pennsylvania	1988	Not issued	-

(continued)

State	Year onsite visit conducted	Year final report issued	Year corrective action plan received
Rhode Island	1986	1987	1988
South Carolina	1986	1987	1987
South Dakota	-	-	-
Tennessee	1987	Not issued	-
Texas	1986	1988	1988
Utah	-	-	-
Vermont	1987	Not issued	-
Virginia	-	-	-
Washington	1988	1988	-
West Virginia	1986	Not issued	1988
Wisconsin	1988	Not issued	-
Wyoming	-	-	-

Summary of GAO Questionnaire Responses

Note: Questions 1 through 3 are excluded from this summary. These questions asked for information on the respondents' (1) length of service working for OSERS; (2) pay plan, job series, and grade level; and (3) length of time in current position.

I. Background

4. For the purpose of this study we have identified four levels of management to which we refer in this questionnaire. Respondents were asked to cite the level of management that best describes their position: (187 responded.)

Number	
4	Senior-level manager—the person between the second level manager and the Assistant Secretary. (e.g., Deputy Assistant Secretary, component heads, and senior administrative officers)
22	Second level manager—the person having direct responsibility for specific program(s) or administrative units. (e.g., Deputy, Associate, and Regional Commissioners; Division Directors; and directors of administrative offices)
59	First level manager—the person reporting to a second level manager or a senior-level manager, with day-to-day responsibility for a particular program(s) and/or administrative functions within an organizational unit. (e.g., Branch Chiefs and senior staff with supervisory responsibilities)
102	Other nonsupervisory personnel (Respondents who identified their position as nonsupervisory personnel were asked to go to question 8.)

II. General Management

Policies, Goals, and Objectives

For the purpose of this section, policy is defined as a decision or set of decisions which provide direction and/or guidance for an organization.

5. To what extent are policies which affect your programs and activities initiated by each of the following entities? (107 responded.)

Entity	Very great extent	Great extent	Moderate extent	Some extent	Little or no extent	Don't know
Congress	47	29	11	9	7	1
White House	5	4	14	15	44	17
Secretary of Education	6	8	16	25	34	12
Under Secretary or Deputy Under Secretary for Management	5	10	17	26	28	14
Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services	45	34	14	9	4	0
Senior-level managers	21	25	31	16	8	2
Second level managers	11	13	25	27	19	3
Regional offices	7	10	9	19	42	7
Other federal organizations (i.e., OMB, OPM, GSA)	13	15	31	18	17	8
Advocacy and interest groups	7	19	15	40	15	5
Other	1	4	3	2	0	2

6. Generally, how are the Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services' goals and objectives concerning special education and rehabilitative services communicated to you? (105 respondents cited one or more method.)

	Number
Formal or informal meetings with the Assistant Secretary	16
Formal or informal meetings with the senior-level manager	48
Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary	45
Memorandum from the senior-level manager	62
Other	30

7. On a recurring basis, the Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services makes decisions on both OSERS policies and operations. Generally, in making these decisions, how effectively does the Assistant Secretary use the activities listed below? (106 responded.)

Activity	Very well	Well	Adequately	Poorly	Very poorly	No basis to judge
Involve appropriate staff	3	7	7	27	36	26
Consider alternatives	2	4	6	23	34	34
Consider long-term effects of decisions	4	4	4	22	35	34
Make decisions in a timely manner	4	3	10	32	34	22
Coordinate with OSERS components during policy formulation process	3	6	4	25	32	35

8. What is your role in the development of goals and objectives for your unit? (185 respondents cited one or more role.)

Role	Number
Not involved	37
Develop and submit the proposed goals and objectives to the second level manager	74
Participate with the second level manager in the development of proposed goals and objectives submitted to the senior-level manager	69
Develop and submit the proposed goals and objectives to the senior-level manager	47
Participate with the senior-level manager in the development of proposed goals and objectives submitted to the Assistant Secretary	41
Participate in the development of the Assistant Secretary's proposed goals and objectives submitted to the Under Secretary or Secretary	4
Participate in discussions with the Assistant Secretary	11
Participate in discussions with the Secretary	1
Other	28

9. Is your individual performance assessed against your unit's (or component's) goals and objectives? (184 responded.)

	Number
Yes	97
No	58
Don't know	29

10. Does your appraisal system provide rewards and incentives for meeting your unit's (or component's) goals and objectives? (185 responded.)

	Number
Yes	44
No	116
Don't know	25

11. Are you held accountable through your individual performance appraisal system for meeting your unit's (or component's) goals and objectives? (184 responded.)

	Number
Yes	113
No	48
Don't know	23

12. Listed below are conditions that may impact on the ability to develop or formulate goals and objectives to implement policies affecting your program and activities. (Respondents were asked if the following conditions exist in their component and the extent the condition impacted on the ability to develop or formulate policies concerning their program and activities. 180 responded.)

Condition	Does it exist? No	Does it exist? Yes	If yes, the extent of impact? Very great extent	Great extent	Moderate extent	Some extent	Little or no extent	Don't know
Unrealistic or unclear policies	30	148	41	55	28	20	3	1
Lack of adequate guidance from OAS	46	125	44	45	20	8	2	4
Lack of adequate guidance from your organizational unit	56	114	31	34	22	21	5	0
Lack of commitment from the Assistant Secretary	60	101	41	41	11	4	3	1
Department clearance untimely (e g , OGC, OPBE)	23	152	62	52	22	11	1	1
Lack of adequately trained staff	43	131	40	42	31	12	0	1
Poor communication among components	27	151	55	36	36	17	3	2
Poor communication among units	31	144	48	37	33	22	1	1
Major changes initiated too often	73	95	42	26	14	9	2	1

13. Your opinions about policy making affecting OSERS' components may reflect both positive and negative experiences. Please describe below a specific policy decision where you believe the decision-making process was less than adequate.

120 respondents identified what the decision was, where the process broke down, and the effects of the problem on their operations.

Planning

14. Which of the following documents or processes are the principal sources of guidance for planning the activities for which you are responsible? (185 respondents cited one or more document.)

Document	Number
The Department's budget	77
Legislative requirements	132
Regulatory requirements	134
Special projects or initiatives	99
Work group/task force initiatives	72
Component operating plan (goals and objectives)	91
Other	42

15. Good management practices generally require that organizations establish long range program goals and objectives. Are you aware of any comprehensive OSERS-wide effort led or coordinated by the Office of the Assistant Secretary to develop such specific goals and objectives? (Respondents were asked to exclude plans that focus on a single area, such as information resources management, evaluation, or specific implementation plans.) (186 responded.)

	Number
Yes	38
No	120
Not sure	28

16. Do you have a written plan or document(s) which describes how you manage your program and activities? (185 responded. Respondents answering "no" were asked to go to question 25; respondents answering "does not apply" were asked to go to question 26.)

	Number
Yes	109
No	63
Does not apply	13

17. Which of the following elements are included in your plan(s)? (109 respondents having written plans cited one or more element.)

Element	Number
Goals and objectives for programs/activities	92
Tasks to be performed	99
Time frames	100
Responsible officials	69
Priorities	74
Alternative tasks	11
Organizational performance measures (i.e., output efficiency measures)	39
Other	9

18. What is your personal role in developing this plan(s)? (109 respondents cited one or more role.)

Role	Number
Not involved	5
Participate with second level manager in development of proposed plan submitted to the senior-level manager	60
Participate with the senior-level manager in the development of the proposed plan submitted to the Assistant Secretary	28
Participate in the development of the Assistant Secretary's proposed plan	4
Develop and submit the unit's proposed plan to the second level manager	28
Develop and submit the unit's proposed plan to the senior-level manager	18
Other	15

19. Of how much use is this written document(s) for managing your unit's activities? (109 responded.)

	Number
Very great use	15
Great use	22
Moderate use	49
Some use	17
Little or no use	6

20. Are you directly involved and responsible for implementing your unit's plan? (108 responded. If respondents answered "no," they were directed to question 26.)

	Number
Yes	89
No	19

21. Listed below are conditions that may have an impact on your ability to implement your unit's plan. (Respondents with written plans were asked if the following conditions exist in their component and the extent the condition impacted on their plan. 86 responded.)

	Does it exist?		If yes, the extent of impact?					
Condition	No	Yes	Very great extent	Great extent	Moderate extent	Some extent	Little or no extent	Don't know
Lack of realistic goals, objectives, and priorities	35	43	11	14	11	7	0	0
Lack of adequately trained staff	34	47	15	16	9	6	1	0
Not enough staff	22	64	29	17	13	4	1	0
Lack of adequate authority	27	57	21	24	7	5	0	0
Lack of commitment by senior managers	39	45	19	15	8	1	1	1
Circumstances change (i.e., legislative changes, budget increase/ decrease, etc.)	19	60	18	23	10	8	1	0
Other	5	27	19	6	1	0	0	0

22. How do you monitor implementation of your plan to ensure that your policies, goals, and objectives are being achieved? (89 respondents cited one or more methods. Respondents who cited "not responsible for monitoring" were directed to question 26.)

	Number
Not responsible for monitoring	10
Meeting with key staff people	57
Written progress reports	44
Management-by-exception principle (i.e. involvement when problems are indicated)	24
Personal involvement in your organization's operations on regular basis	51
Use of performance measures (i.e. timeliness, quality, productivity, etc.)	49
Other	12

23. If you are responsible for monitoring implementation of your plan, where are the monitoring results forwarded? (76 respondents cited one or more.)

	Number
Results not forwarded	5
Supervisor	51
Component head	31
Office of the Assistant Secretary	9
Other	12

24. Are these monitoring results provided orally or in writing? (70 responded.)

	Number
Orally	4
In writing	15
Both orally and in writing	51

25. If you do not have a written management plan, what methods do you use to help manage your program and activities?

48 respondents provided methods they used to help manage their programs and activities.

Program Direction

26. In your opinion, does the Office of the Assistant Secretary (OAS) set broad program priorities for each component? (182 responded. Respondents who answered "no" were directed to question 28.)

	Number
Yes	114
No	64
Don't know	4

27. One function of the Office of the Assistant Secretary (OAS) is to establish broad program priorities for the components and oversee their implementation. In your view, how well does the Office of the Assistant Secretary do each of the following? (121 responded.)

Activity	Very well	Well	Adequately	Poorly	Very poorly	No basis to judge
Communicate the Assistant Secretary's program priorities to RSA, NIDRR, and OSEP	14	7	24	36	25	15
Establish realistic OSERS-wide objectives	4	7	16	37	39	16
Track RSA, NIDRR, and OSEP's implementation of the Assistant Secretary's priorities	8	10	17	34	16	35
Coordinate activities requiring cooperation between OAS and the components	2	6	9	40	35	28
Respond to major concerns surfaced by senior-level managers, the regional offices, and constituents	4	3	9	27	51	27

28. OSERS has a unique organizational structure in that the Assistant Secretary as well as two of the three component heads reporting to her (RSA's commissioner and NIDRR's director) are appointed by the President. To what extent do you believe the overall OSERS' organizational structure positively or negatively affects the decision making process of your component? (181 responded.)

	Number
Very positive	5
Positive	2
Neither positive nor negative	35
Negative	56
Very negative	50
No basis to judge	33

29. To what extent do you believe the OSERS' operational practices positively or negatively affect your component's ability to get necessary supportive services (e.g., personnel, travel, equipment)? (183 responded.)

	Number
Very positive	2
Positive	1
Neither positive nor negative	15
Negative	51
Very negative	98
No basis to judge	16

30. In your opinion, how well or poorly does your component carry out its overall statutory requirements? (i.e., fulfilling congressional mandates) (185 responded.)

	Number
Very well	37
Well	70
Neither well nor poorly	32
Poorly	34
Very poorly	10
Don't know	2

31. We realize that you may have had both positive and negative experiences within OSERS. However, for purposes of this review, we are interested in identifying management areas needing improvement. Please describe a specific instance where you believe your component carried out its statutory requirements less than adequately. (If respondents could identify a management area needing improvement, they were asked to specify its effect on their component's operation.)

121 described a specific instance where they believed that their component carried out its statutory requirements less than adequately.

32. Based on your OSERS experience and in your opinion, how appropriate is the degree of involvement by the Office of the Assistant Secretary (OAS) for each of the following functions, within your component? (184 responded.)

Function	Too much involvement by OAS	Appropriate involvement by OAS	Too little involvement by OAS	No basis to judge
Program planning	76	22	23	55
Policy setting	92	27	18	39
Resource allocation	119	20	10	31
Program management	101	23	19	36
Program evaluation	56	21	38	59
Administrative operations	114	14	12	22
Hiring practices	117	21	8	33
Travel approvals	149	11	3	20
Other	23	1	2	7

33. One management function within OSERS is to provide interpretations of legislation, regulations, policy memorandums, directives, etc. Is responding to questions or providing interpretations on this general guidance material raised by states and grantees important to fulfilling your assigned duties and responsibilities? (184 responded.)

	Number
Yes	144
No	40

34. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements concerning the existing quality of written policy guidance which your component provides to states and grantees? (Of the 144 who answered "yes" in question 33, 136 responded to this question.)

Written policy guidance is.....	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Unclear	29	37	25	30	6
Too detailed	2	8	38	57	16
Not detailed enough	13	40	40	17	6
Too technical	2	7	47	50	11
Outdated	33	31	22	28	8
Other	30	7	1	2	0

Financial Data

35. If the quality of financial data (i.e., budget data; cost accounting which provides unit, program, or organizational costs; grant or contract management; etc.) creates management problems for you, briefly describe the problem, the effects it has on your operations, and identify the financial system or report from which the financial data is obtained.

72 provided narrative responses.

III. Personnel

Staffing

36. Listed below are personnel conditions that may affect your ability to achieve program goals and objectives. Respondents were asked if the following conditions exist in their component and if so, the extent the condition affected achieving program goals and objectives. (180 responded.)

Condition	Does it exist? No	Does it exist? Yes	If yes, the extent of effect? Very great extent	Great extent	Moderate extent	Some extent	Little or no extent	Don't know
Staff vacancies	28	152	64	51	24	6	4	0
Staff in "acting" positions	37	143	55	38	22	12	10	4
Lack of adequate training	39	136	49	33	36	10	3	2
Inadequate performance appraisal system	66	108	34	27	26	10	4	5
Lack of discipline	102	68	13	19	19	8	6	1
Inadequate experience or knowledge of staff	75	97	27	33	22	10	3	0
Other	4	37	24	10	1	0	0	0

37. If a position you know to be critical to the success of your organizational unit becomes vacant, can your component fill it with a qualified individual in a time frame that meets the unit's requirements? (182 responded. The respondents who cited "not applicable to my position" or "almost always" were directed to question 39.)

	Number
Not applicable to my position	29
Almost always	11
Sometimes	42
Seldom/never	100

38. To what extent do you attribute the difficulty in filling a vacancy to each of the following factors? (143 responded.)

Factor	Very great extent	Great extent	Moderate extent	Some extent	Little or no extent	Don't know
Poor recruitment effort	14	26	29	22	35	9
Limited pool of applicants	10	22	18	19	51	15
Low starting pay	13	21	25	22	41	13
Classification standards	16	16	17	21	43	22
Poor image of federal government	32	18	21	22	28	18
Competition from other federal or private employers	12	19	24	16	46	19
Civil Service rules and procedures	14	18	25	22	42	16
Department procedures	36	27	19	20	16	18
OSERS procedures	59	32	16	7	9	14
OSERS personnel/administrative staff not helpful	40	26	16	8	19	29
OSERS personnel/administrative staff not qualified	24	19	11	9	24	48
Limited promotion potential	37	28	21	18	20	11
Budget constraints	36	22	18	17	18	21
Lack of delegated authority from component head or regional commissioner	41	17	8	9	30	30

39. Many current and former top-level managers in government believe that institutional memory is important for continuity and perspective. Others stress the advantages of bringing in new people with fresh perspectives. In your view, is the turnover rate in your component—i.e. the rate at which managers and senior staff enter and leave (NIDRR, OSEP, or RSA)—too high, too low, or about right? (168 responded. If respondents did not cite "too high" for either managers or senior staff, they were directed to question 41.)

	Manager and senior staff turnover rate is:			
	Don't know	Too low	About right	Too high
Managers	18	19	31	98
Senior staff	20	16	34	95

40. A high turnover rate could have changed certain characteristics of your unit. Please indicate if high turnover has increased or decreased the occurrence of each characteristic listed below. (113 responded.)

Characteristic	Increased greatly	Increased somewhat	Remained the same	Decreased somewhat	Decreased greatly
Number of qualified staff in your unit	5	8	28	39	31
Number of unqualified staff in your unit	13	26	56	8	1
Efficiency and effectiveness of your unit	7	6	18	50	31
Employee morale in your unit	8	2	7	28	68
Other	7	1	0	2	8

Training and Development

41. To what extent do you believe Department of Education-sponsored internal training and development programs have been effective or ineffective in improving your performance? (183 responded.)

	Number
Very effective	3
Effective	25
Neither effective or ineffective	45
Ineffective	23
Very ineffective	59
Don't know	18
None or little offered	10

42. Listed below are conditions that may influence the effectiveness of Department-sponsored internal training and development programs. (Respondents were asked if the following conditions exist in their component and, if so, the extent the condition detracted from the effectiveness of their internal training and development programs. 172 responded.)

Condition	Does it exist? No	Does it exist? Yes	If yes, the extent it detracts: Very great extent	Great extent	Moderate extent	Some extent	Little or no extent	Don't know
Lack of a clearly defined training program	24	148	54	45	25	21	2	1
Limited staff time allowed for training	55	112	39	37	19	13	1	1
Lack of OSERS commitment to develop and support staff training	31	132	63	40	18	7	0	2
Courses do not meet employee needs	55	100	24	25	27	18	2	2
Courses do not meet program needs	45	107	50	29	24	18	3	1
Lack of personnel office assistance	65	82	31	13	16	11	1	5
Training staff not qualified	95	57	10	4	8	5	3	6
Cuts in training funds	25	128	75	24	16	4	1	6
Other	0	22	16	6	1	0	0	0

IV. Grants and Contracts

Discretionary Grants and Contracts

43. Are the awarding and/or administration of discretionary grants or contracts an essential part of or important to fulfilling your job-related duties? (186 responded.) If respondents answered "no" to both, they were directed to question 58.)

	Yes	No
Contracts	60	99
Discretionary grants	119	62

44. Within the award process, the Department of Education has written procedures for (1) selecting field readers for reviewing proposals; and (2) awarding and administering discretionary grants and/or contracts. In your opinion, to what extent does your organizational unit adhere to these procedures? (128 responded.)

Procedures	Very great extent	Great extent	Moderate extent	Some extent	Little or no extent	Don't know
Selecting field readers	51	37	21	8	5	5
Awarding & administering grants/ contracts	55	44	15	6	2	6

45. In your opinion, how often are field readers added to the review panel after the component's list of qualified readers is forwarded to OAS for review and approval? (122 responded. If respondents cited "neither often nor seldom," "seldom," "very seldom," or "never," they were directed to question 48.)

	Number
Very often	19
Often	24
Neither often nor seldom	23
Seldom	17
Very seldom	19
Never	14
Don t know	6

46. In your opinion, how often are these additions to the review panel list justified in writing by the Office of the Assistant Secretary? (46 responded. Only respondents indicating "very often" or "often" in question 45 were directed to answer question 46 and question 47.)

	Number
Very often	2
Often	3
Neither often nor seldom	1
Seldom	4
Very seldom	6
Never	18
Don t know	12

47. In your opinion, how often does this occur in order to influence a particular discretionary grant or contract? (48 responded.)

	Number
Very often	7
Often	14
Neither often nor seldom	3
Seldom	1
Very seldom	3
Never	4
Don't know	16

48. When monitoring discretionary grants and/or contracts, is a telephone contact used as a monitoring method? (131 responded. If respondents cited "no," they were directed to question 51.)

	Number
Yes	112
No	16
Don't know	3

49. What items must be discussed in the telephone contact?

103 provided narrative responses.

50. How frequently are these calls made? (110 responded.)

Frequency	Number
Monthly	12
Quarterly	9
Semiannually	10
Annually	11
Other	68

51. Is an on-site visit used to monitor discretionary grants and/or contracts? (129 responded. If respondents cited "no," they were directed to question 54.)

	Number
Yes	89
No	40

52. Generally, how often are discretionary grants and/or contracts monitored on site by your organizational unit? (83 responded.)

Frequency	Discretionary grants	Contracts
Every year	6	6
Every 2 years	13	6
Every 3 years	6	1
Every 4 years	4	1
5 or more years (respondents were asked to provide an example)	26	7
Other	25[a]	5

[a]21 of 25 respondents stated that some discretionary grants are never monitored.

53. In general, what is the average length of time it takes to prepare and issue final monitoring reports to the grantee or contractor after a monitoring visit is completed? (82 responded.)

Frequency	Discretionary grants	Contracts
1-90 days	69	21
3 months but less than 6 months	6	0
6 months but less than 1 year	3	1
1 year to 3 years	1	0
More than 3 years (respondents were asked to provide an example)	0	1
Never	0	1
Other	2	0

54. The following are some key events in the discretionary grants cycle. Please indicate to what extent you believe your organizational unit has a problem accomplishing each event. (125 responded. If no event was a "serious" or "very serious problem," respondents were directed to question 56.)

Event	No problem	Minor problem	Moderate problem	Serious problem	Very serious problem
Identify relative order of importance among program areas to receive grants	44	23	13	20	14
Develop and issue notice of closing dates	32	26	19	23	15
Send grant application materials to interested parties in a timely manner	42	16	27	19	14
Peer reviewer (field reader) selection	28	26	34	17	14
Manage peer review panels	59	31	22	6	3
Negotiate with applicants	56	26	19	8	6
Monitor corrective actions	34	19	25	23	13
Evaluate grant performance	22	8	31	36	22

55. Respondents were asked to list up to 2 events, in question 54, they considered most serious and to explain what caused the problem.

78 respondents cited at least one event they considered most serious and explained what caused the problem.

56. The following are some key events in the contracting cycle. Please indicate to what extent you believe your organizational unit has a problem accomplishing each event. (79 responded. If no event was a "serious" or "very serious" problem, respondents were sent to question 58.)

Event	No problem	Minor problem	Moderate problem	Serious problem	Very serious problem
Identify relative order of importance among program areas to receive contracts	36	11	12	10	5
Prepare and transmit request for contract to Grants and Contracts Service	26	19	16	5	7
Develop request for proposals (RFPs)	32	14	16	7	7
Peer reviewer selection	32	23	9	4	5
Manage peer review panels	50	14	6	2	1
Monitor corrective actions	30	16	9	6	7
Evaluate contract performance	30	10	11	9	10

57. Respondents were asked to list up to 2 events, in question 56, they considered most serious and to explain what caused the problem.

28 respondents cited at least one event they considered most serious and explained what caused the problem.

Formula Grants

58. Is the distribution and administration of formula grants an essential part of or important to fulfilling your job-related duties? (182 responded. Respondents who cited "no" were sent to question 65.)

	Number
Yes	85
No	97

59. Generally, how often are formula grants monitored on site by your organizational unit? (83 responded.)

Frequency	Number
Every year	33
Every 2 years	10
Every 3 years	11
Every 4 years	10
Five or more years	7
Never	8
Other	4

60. In general, what is the average length of time it takes to prepare and issue final monitoring reports to the grantee after a monitoring visit is completed? (74 responded.)

Frequency	Number
1-90 days	50
3 months but less than 6 months	8
6 months but less than 1 year	4
1 year to 3 years	11
More than 3 years	0
Other	1

61. The following are some key events in the formula grant cycle. Please indicate to what extent you believe your organizational unit has a problem accomplishing each event. (83 responded.)

Event	No problem	Minor problem	Moderate problem	Serious problem	Very serious problem
Review state plans	41	13	11	10	3
Approve state plans	40	16	10	6	4
Compute award amount	42	13	6	3	2
Issue award	37	16	7	7	1
Monitor compliance	9	8	13	28	19

62. Respondents were asked to list 1 event, in question 61, they considered most serious and to explain what caused the problem.

40 of 54 respondents cited "monitor compliance" as the most serious problem and explained the causes.

63. In your opinion, how often do grantees fulfill requirements satisfactorily? (80 responded. If respondent cited "always or almost always" or "most of the time," we sent them to question 65.)

	Number
Always or almost always	5
Most of the time	44
About half the time	20
Some of the time	9
Never or hardly ever	2

64. Inability to satisfactorily fulfill grant requirements may result from poor grantee performance or inadequate agency administration of the grant. In your opinion, to what extent do each of the following factors account for such unsatisfactory performance? (34 responded.)

Factor	Very great extent	Great extent	Moderate extent	Some extent	Little or no extent	Don't know
Inadequate performance by grantee	3	9	12	9	0	1
Lack of OSERS staff to mo[illegible]antees	14	16	0	1	1	1
OSERS staff assigned to positions without proper training or qualifications	8	12	5	3	3	2
Inadequate system for assuring that corrective actions or recommendations made in monitoring reports are implemented	9	13	4	7	0	1
Lack of technical assistance provided by OSERS staff	12	12	3	3	2	1
Lack of program guidance provided by OSERS staff	14	11	2	3	2	1

V. Supplies, Equipment, and Services

65. In carrying out your unit's operations, adequate supplies and equipment are important. How often do you have problems in obtaining adequate supplies and equipment for your organizational unit? (183 responded. If respondents cited "never or hardly ever," we sent them to question 68.)

	Number
Never or hardly ever	35
Some of the time	41
About half the time	17
Most of the time	56
Always or almost always	34

66. Respondents were asked to please identify one item most difficult to obtain.

142 provided narrative responses.

67. To what extent do you attribute the problems in obtaining supplies and equipment to each of the following factors? (147 responded.)

Factor	Very great extent	Great extent	Moderate extent	Some extent	Little or no extent	Don't know
Lack of authority to obtain supplies	48	22	14	10	22	15
Overburdening procedures/regulations	28	26	17	16	20	23
Budget restrictions	72	26	11	13	6	15
Other	24	8	1	0	0	2

68. Generally, how often do you have problems in obtaining adequate external services (such as experts for panels, consultants, etc.) for carrying out your responsibilities? (185 responded. If respondents cited "not applicable" or "never or hardly ever," we sent them to question 70.)

	Number
Not applicable	50
Never or hardly ever	48
Some of the time	40
About half of the time	16
Most of the time	19
Always or almost always	12

69. To what extent do you attribute the problems in obtaining external services to each of the following factors? (86 responded.)

Factor	Very great extent	Great extent	Moderate extent	Some extent	Little or no extent	Don't know
Lack of authority to purchase services	25	18	11	6	11	4
Overburdening procedures/regulations	16	18	15	7	15	4
Budget restrictions	39	18	6	5	6	5
Other	23	4	3	1	0	1

VI. Organizational Performance

For the purposes of the following questions, organizational performance is defined as how well your organizational unit as a whole—not individuals—provides services in terms of efficiency (productivity, timeliness, quality, etc.)

70. Do you have any of the following kinds of documents which include organizational performance measures? (182 responded. Respondents who cited "individual unit work plan," "agency or organizational workplan," or "both of the above" were sent to question 72, while respondents who cited "don't know" were sent to question 73.)

	Number
Individual unit work plan(s)	40
Agency or organizational work plan(s)	13
Both of the above	47
Don't know	28
None of the above	54

71. If organizational performance measures do not exist for your unit, describe the approach you use to determine how efficiently you are operating. (After respondents described their approach, we sent them to question 82.)

52 provided narrative responses.

72. In your work plan(s), what specific activities are measured for performance? (e.g., grants and contract awarded, monitoring visits performed, regulations issued, etc.)

92 provided narrative responses.

73. Do you use the following performance measures to assess the organizational performance of your unit? (119 responded.)

Performance measure	Yes	No
Productivity (i.e., ratio of staff days to items produced and/or services provided)	28	76
Quality	87	26
Timeliness	107	10
User satisfaction	55	44
Other	10	9

74. Over the last 3 years, based on the performance measures mentioned in question 73 and/or other factors, how would you classify the organizational performance of your unit? (125 responded. Respondents citing "performance good and constant or no change," "performance poor and constant or no change," or "don't know" were sent to question 77. Respondents citing "performance poor and declining" were sent to question 76.)

	Number
Performance good and improving	33
Performance good and constant or no change	42
Performance poor and constant or no change	11
Performance poor and declining	25
Don't know	13
Performance good and declining	1

75. If performance on some measures has shown improvement, improved performance may have been achieved at the expense of timeliness and/or quality. In your opinion, do you think this has happened in your organizational unit? (33 responded and were directed to question 77.)

Improved performance at the expense of ...	Yes	No
Timeliness	10	23
Quality	8	24

76. If, in your opinion, the organizational performance of your unit has been declining, indicate to what extent each of the following is a cause of this decline. (29 responded.)

Reason	Very great extent	Great extent	Moderate extent	Some extent	Little or no extent	Don't know
Increased workload	10	0	6	2	2	0
Staff reduction	10	4	3	2	1	1
Loss of experienced staff and continuity	14	4	4	2	1	0
Decreased staff morale	23	5	1	0	0	0
Reorganization	6	1	7	3	5	1
New legislative authority	6	3	4	3	11	0
Lack of managerial direction	14	4	6	0	1	0
Other	10	0	0	0	0	0

77. What strategies does your unit use to implement organizational performance improvements? (123 respondents cited one or more strategy. If respondent cited "none," we sent them to question 82.)

	Number
Performance plans	67
Performance goals	51
Evaluation [illegible]	31
Specific performance improvement projects (task force committees, work groups, etc.)	57
Emphasis on [illegible] (timeliness, quality, cycles, etc.)	33
Other	15
None	15

78. If your unit uses specific techniques to improve your organization's performance, indicate which technique(s) you use and also indicate if you believe the technique(s) is successful or unsuccessful. (99 responded.)

Technique	Technique used?		If used, is it successful or unsuccessful?		
	No	Yes	Successful	Unsuccessful	Don't know
Technology improvement	32	64	46	2	14
Staff development	44	54	38	5	11
Change in work methods	59	38	27	4	6
Improving mechanisms for employee accountability	49	46	24	15	6
Use of employee incentives	70	29	15	5	6
Quality of worklife improvements	78	20	9	6	5
Change in management personnel	55	38	13	13	10
Change in management or supervisory methods	62	32	11	12	6
Change in work environment	67	27	7	16	4
Other	1	4	4	0	0

79. Respondent was asked to choose one particular technique from question 78 that was identified as being successful and to explain why it has been successful.

69 provided narrative responses.

80. If respondent identified any techniques in question 78 as being unsuccessful, we asked them to explain why for one technique.

34 provided narrative responses.

81. Listed below are conditions that may hinder the organizational performance of your unit. Respondents were asked if the following conditions exist in their unit and the extent the condition hindered the organizational performance of their unit programs? (104 responded.)

	Does it exist?		If yes, the extent it hinders performance					
Condition	No	Yes	Very great extent	Great extent	Moderate extent	Some extent	Little or no extent	Don't know
Personnel ceilings	11	91	31	20	16	12	7	3
Budget reductions	14	84	40	22	8	7	3	3
Lack of OAS support	22	75	40	12	11	6	0	5
Lack of support within your component	54	46	10	9	14	6	1	4
Staff resistance to change	49	51	5	9	16	18	0	2
Employee turnover rate	47	53	12	17	14	4	5	1
Manager turnover rate	43	58	16	20	8	7	4	1
Multiple or conflicting performance goals	46	51	17	13	14	6	0	0
Lack of support services	26	77	32	22	10	7	1	2
Inadequately trained staff	42	58	12	20	11	10	1	2
Physical barriers to handicapped staff	64	33	10	8	9	3	1	2

VII. Overall Views

82. In your opinion, has the Assistant Secretary's overall management approach had a positive or negative effect on the day-to-day management of your unit? (184 responded.)

	Number
Very positive effect	2
Positive effect	7
No effect	17
Negative effect	70
Very negative effect	76
Don't know	12

83. Please identify up to two current operational or programmatic problems, if any, that adversely affect your unit?

160 identified at least one operational or programmatic problem that adversely affected their unit.

84. If you could focus on solving only one problem within OSERS, what would that problem be?

175 identified at least one problem within OSERS they would focus on solving.

Summary of Telephone Interviews With State Vocational Rehabilitation Directors

Note: Questions 1 and 2, employment data of state vocational rehabilitation directors, are excluded from the summary.

These interviews focused on (1) the leadership provided by the Office of the Assistant Secretary (OAS) and RSA; (2) their responsiveness to state needs; and (3) the quality of services provided. Unless otherwise noted, the total number of respondents was 51. Percent column may not add to 100 due to rounding.

I. Program Direction

3. One of the functions of the Office of the Assistant Secretary is to provide program leadership and direction by establishing national program goals and objectives for handicapped persons. In your opinion, how well has this Office done in establishing national goals and objectives?

	Number	Percent
Very well	2	4
Well	5	10
Neither well nor poorly	11	22
Poorly	18	35
Very poorly	15	29
Don't know	0	0
No basis to judge	0	0

4. Regardless of how you may feel about these goals and objectives, how well does the Office of the Assistant Secretary or RSA communicate to you these national program goals and objectives?

	Number	Percent
Very well	1	2
Well	10	20
Neither well nor poorly	9	18
Poorly	16	31
Very poorly	15	29
Don't know	0	0
No basis to judge	0	0

5. RSA has been charged by the Rehabilitation Act of 1986 with establishing and maintaining a state and federal program for vocational rehabilitation. In your view, how well has RSA fulfilled its role as a partner with the states in providing and enhancing rehabilitative services? (If state directors answered "poorly" or "very poorly," they were referred to question 6. All other respondents were referred to question 7.)

	Number	Percent
Very well	0	0
Well	5	10
Poorly	23	45
Very poorly	22	43
Don't know	0	0
No basis to judge	1	2

6. Is there any specific instance you can recall where RSA did not adequately fulfill its role as a partner with the states?

45 state vocational rehabilitation directors provided examples where RSA did not adequately fulfill its role as a partner with the states.

II. Policy Guidance

7. Generally, how are RSA policies which impact on your state program communicated to you? (50 state directors responded.)

	Number
Orally	3
Written memoranda or directives	47
Other	0

8. As you probably know, RSA issued the "Rehabilitation Services Manual" in 1974 as a primary source of program policies and administrative policy guidance for use by the states and RSA regional offices. However, in 1983, another version of this manual was issued.[1] It is our understanding that certain states use the 1974 manual rather than the more recent 1983 manual to assist in administration of their programs. Which of these two manuals (the 1974 or 1983 version) do you and your staff use most frequently and please explain why?

	Number	Percent
1974	31	61
1983	2	4
Both	1	2
Neither 1974 nor 1983	7	14
Not sure, possibly 1983	4	8
Don't know	6	12

9. Other than the Rehabilitation Services Manual, what other federal policy guidance is provided to you by RSA concerning rehabilitative services matters? (Respondent was asked to identify what RSA organizational unit provides the information.)

50 state vocational rehabilitation directors identified other federal policy guidance provided by RSA.

10. In an overall sense, is the written policy guidance you receive from RSA timely?

	Number	Percent
Yes	6	12
No	43	84
Other	1	2
Don't know	1	2

[1] Many state directors said that the 1983 version was never issued by the Department. This was later confirmed by an RSA official.

11. How would you characterize the usefulness of the policy guidance you receive from RSA? (If state directors answered "very useful" or "don't know," they were referred to question 13.)

	Number	Percent
Very useful	2	4
Moderately useful	33	65
Not very useful	14	27
Useless	0	0
Don't know	2	4

12. In your opinion, what if anything needs to be done to further improve the usefulness of the policy guidance RSA provides to your state?

46 state vocational rehabilitation directors provided suggestions that could further improve the usefulness of the policy guidance RSA provides to their state.

Note: Questions 13 through 17 concern the quality of written explanations or interpretations of federal policy the states receive from RSA. These explanations or interpretations of policy would be found in RSA regulations, explanatory memos, directives, policy statements, etc.

13. . . . do you think written RSA guidance is TOO DETAILED, NOT DETAILED ENOUGH, or ABOUT RIGHT?

	Number	Percent
Too detailed	6	12
About right	25	49
Not detailed enough	18	35
Don't know	2	4

14. . . . do you think written RSA guidance is CURRENT or OUT-DATED? (If state directors answered "current" or "don't know," they were referred to question 16.)

	Number	Percent
Current	12	24
Outdated	37	73
Don't know	2	4

15. . . . if you believe RSA guidance is outdated please explain why you feel that way.

31 state vocational rehabilitation directors provided explanations on why they believe RSA guidance is outdated.

16. . . . do you think written RSA guidance is TOO TECHNICAL, NOT TECHNICAL ENOUGH, or ABOUT RIGHT?

	Number	Percent
Too technical	3	6
About right	33	65
Not technical enough	11	22
Don't know	3	6
Other	1	2

17. In an overall sense, do you think this guidance taken as a whole is CLEAR or UNCLEAR?

	Number	Percent
Clear	18	35
Unclear	28	55
Don't know	5	10

III. Responsiveness

18. In your experience, have RSA staff generally been knowledgeable about the kinds of rehabilitation services needed in your state?

	Number	Percent
Yes	19	37
No	32	63
Don't know	0	0

19. Based on your experiences, how well do RSA staff work with officials and staff in your state to resolve problems?

	Number	Percent
Very well	14	27
Well	15	29
Poorly	18	35
Very poorly	4	8
Don't know	0	0

20. . . . are you aware of RSA staff who lack the necessary rehabilitative services expertise to perform their assigned duties and responsibilities? (If state directors answered "no" or "don't know," they were referred to question 24.)

	Number	Percent
Yes	32	63
No	16	31
Don't know	3	6

21. In your opinion, do you believe this lack of expertise results from RSA staff being inexperienced, improperly trained, both inexperienced and improperly trained, or some other reason? (All 32 state directors who were asked this question responded.)

	Number
Inexperienced	2
Improperly trained	3
Both inexperienced and improperly trained	23
Other	4

22. . . . has this had a positive, negative, or no effect on your ability to achieve your state program goals? (If respondents answered "positive," "no effect," or "don't know," they were referred to question 24. All 32 state directors who were asked this question responded.)

	Number	Percent
Positive	0	0
Negative	28	88
No effect	4	13
Don't know	0	0

23. Could you give us an example of the negative effect this situation has had on your state program?

All 28 state vocational rehabilitation directors who were asked this question provided examples of negative effects particular situations had on their state programs.

24. How effective has the RSA staff been in providing any technical assistance (i.e., applying specific program knowledge and/or special skills) requested by your office?

	Number	Percent
Very effective	3	6
Effective	10	20
Neither effective nor ineffective	12	24
Not effective	23	45
Don't know	1	2
No basis to judge	2	4

25. Over the last three years, approximately how many times have you requested and received on-site technical assistance (T/A) in your state from RSA staff?

20 states said "none or one" T/A visit.
19 states said "2 to 9" T/A visits.
3 states said "21 to 36" T/A visits.
9 states said "other."[1]

26. Within the same three year period, have you requested on-site technical assistance but had it denied by the RSA Central Office? (45 state directors responded. If respondents answered "no" or "don't know," they were referred to question 29.)

	Number	Percent
Yes	31	69
No	13	29
Don't know	1	2

[1] These states said no site visits were requested because (1) they knew the visits would be denied by OSERS, or (2) RSA staff was inexperienced or unqualified.

27. Approximately how many times was on-site technical assistance (T/A) requested but denied by RSA within the last three years? (All 31 state directors who were asked this question responded.)

25 states said 1-10 requests denied.
5 states said more than 10 requests denied.
1 state said "many."

28. For what reason(s) do you believe this (these) requested visit(s) was denied?

33 of 34 state vocational rehabilitation directors responding believed that travel restrictions was the primary reason why their requests for on-site technical assistance were denied.

IV. Training

29. Does RSA provide training to your staff? (If respondents answered "no" or "don't know," they were referred to question 32.)

	Number	Percent
Yes	4	8
No	47	92
Don't know	0	0

30. How would you rate the quality of training provided to your state by RSA? (If respondents answered "good," "don't know," or "no basis to judge," they were referred to question 32.) (All 4 state directors who were asked this question responded.)

	Number
Good	1
Adequate	1
Poor	2
Don't know	0

31. In your opinion, how could the quality of training be improved? (3 of 4 state directors who were asked this question cited one or more.)

	Number
Upgraded curriculum	1
Better trained instructors	2
Greater accessibility to training (i.e., more money for travel)	1
Other	1

V. RSA Management

32. Over the past several years, RSA's central office has had several managerial positions vacant for extended periods of time or certain managerial positions have been filled with people functioning in an "acting" capacity. Are you aware of this situation? (State directors answering "no" or "don't know" were referred to question 35.)

	Number	Percent
Yes	51	100
No	0	0

33. Has this situation within RSA's central office had a positive, negative, or no effect on achieving your state program goals? State directors answering "positive," "no effect," or "don't know" were referred to question 35.)

	Number	Percent
Positive	0	0
Negative	37	73
No effect	12	24
Don't know	2	4

34. Could you give us one example of the effect vacant managerial positions at the RSA Central Office or such positions filled by an individual in an "acting" capacity has had on your state program?

34 state vocational rehabilitation directors provided examples of negative effects the vacant managerial positions or individuals in an "acting" capacity at the RSA Central Office had on their state program.

35. Similarly, are you aware of vacant managerial positions or "acting managers" at the RSA regional office serving your state? (State directors answering "no" were referred to question 38.)

	Number	Percent
Yes	36	77
No	11	23

36. What effect has staffing managerial positions in the RSA regional office with "acting" personnel or leaving positions vacant had on achieving your state program goals? (State directors answering "positive," "no effect," or "don't know" were referred to question 38. All 36 state directors who were asked this question responded.)

	Number
Positive	14
Negative	7
No effect	13
Don't know	2

37. Could you give us one example of the effect vacant positions in the RSA regional office or such positions filled by an individual in an "acting" capacity has had on your state program?

22 state vocational rehabilitation directors provided examples of negative effects that vacant positions, or such positions filled by an individual in an "acting" capacity, at the RSA regional office had on their state program.

VI. Program Monitoring

38. How is RSA program monitoring usually performed? (51 state directors cited one or more method.)

Method	Number
By telephone	22
By on-site visits	30
Other	9

39. Over the last three years, approximately how many times have on-site monitoring visits been performed in your state by RSA staff? (If respondents indicated "none" or "don't know," they were referred to question 41.)

1 states indicated "none."
10 states indicated "1 visit."
28 states indicated "2 or 3 visits."
8 states indicated "4 or more visits."
1 state indicated "don't know."

40. In regard to the most recent RSA monitoring visit, how soon after the monitoring visit was completed did you receive a monitoring visit report? (All 46 state directors who were asked this question responded.)

	Number
Within 3 months	32
Within 6 months	3
Within 9 months	1
1 year or more	1
Varied	1
Don't Know	1
Other	7

VII. Other

41. To conclude, in your opinion, is there any issue regarding your state relationship with the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services and/or RSA that you would like to discuss?

43 state vocational rehabilitation directors described additional issues.

Summary of Telephone Interviews With State Special Education Directors

Note: Questions 1 and 2, employment data of state special education directors, are excluded from the summary.

These interviews focused on (1) the leadership provided by the Office of the Assistant Secretary (OAS) and OSEP; (2) their responsiveness to state needs; and (3) the quality of services provided. Unless otherwise noted, the total number of respondents was 51. Percent columns may not add to 100 due to rounding.

I. Program Direction

3. One of the functions of the Office of the Assistant Secretary is to provide program leadership and direction by establishing national program goals and objectives for persons with handicapping conditions. In your opinion, how well has this Office done in establishing national goals and objectives?

	Number	Percent
Very well	9	18
Well	24	47
Neither well nor poorly	10	20
Poorly	6	12
Very poorly	1	2
Don't know	0	0
No basis to judge	1	2

4. Regardless of how you may feel about those goals and objectives, how well does the Office of the Assistant Secretary or OSEP communicate to you these national program goals and objectives?

	Number	Percent
Very well	6	12
Well	22	43
Neither well nor poorly	10	20
Poorly	11	22
Very poorly	2	4
Don't know	0	0
No basis to judge	0	0

II. Policy Guidance

5. Generally, how are OSEP policies which impact on your state program communicated to you? (51 state directors cited one or more method.)

	Number
Orally	17
Written memoranda or directives	38
Other	14

6. What kind of federal policy guidance is provided to you by OSEP concerning special education matters? (State directors were asked to identify the OSEP organizational unit providing the information.)

51 state special education directors described the kind of federal policy guidance provided by OSEP.

7. In an overall sense, is the written policy guidance you receive from OSEP timely?

	Number	Percent
Yes	18	35
No	33	65

8. How would you characterize the usefulness of the policy guidance you receive from OSEP? (If state directors answered "very useful" or "don't know," they were referred to question 10.)

	Number	Percent
Very useful	7	14
Moderately useful	20	39
Not very useful	18	35
Useless	4	8
Don't know	2	4

9. In your opinion, what if anything needs to be done to further improve the usefulness of the policy guidance OSEP provides to your state?

All 42 state special education directors who were asked this question provided suggestions that could further improve the usefulness of OSEP's policy guidance provided to their states.

Note: Questions 10 through 14 concern the quality of written explanations or interpretations of federal policy the states receive from OSEP. These explanations or interpretations of policy would be found in OSEP regulations, explanatory memos, directives, policy statements, etc.

10. . . . . do you think written OSEP guidance is TOO DETAILED, NOT DETAILED ENOUGH, or ABOUT RIGHT? (49 state directors responded.)

	Number	Percent
Too detailed	5	10
About right	23	47
Not detailed enough	15	31
Don't know	3	6
Varies	3	6

11. . . . do you think written OSEP guidance is CURRENT or OUTDATED? (49 state directors responded.)

	Number	Percent
Current	28	57
Outdated	15	31
Don't know	6	12

12. . . . if you believe OSEP guidance is outdated please explain why you feel that way.

17 state special education directors provided explanations on why they believed OSEP guidance was outdated.

13. . . . do you think written OSEP guidance is TOO TECHNICAL, NOT TECHNICAL ENOUGH, or ABOUT RIGHT? (49 state directors responded.)

	Number	Percent
Too technical	7	14
About right	29	59
Not technical enough	12	25
Don't know	1	2

14. In an overall sense, do you think this guidance taken as a whole is CLEAR or UNCLEAR? (48 state directors responded.)

	Number	Percent
Clear	26	54
Unclear	21	44
Don't know	1	2

III. Responsiveness

15. In your experience, have OSEP staff generally been knowledgeable about the kinds of special education programs needed in your state?

	Number	Percent
Yes	18	35
No	29	57
Don't know	4	8

16. Based on your experiences, how well do OSEP staff work with officials and staff in your state to resolve problems?

	Number	Percent
Very well	7	14
Well	21	41
Poorly	17	33
Very poorly	4	8
Don't know	2	4

17. . . . are you aware of OSEP staff who lack necessary special education expertise to perform their assigned duties and responsibilities? (If state directors answered "no" or "don't know," they were referred to question 21.)

	Number	Percent
Yes	17	33
No	24	47
Don't know	10	20

18. In your opinion, do you believe this lack of expertise results from OSEP staff being inexperienced, improperly trained, both inexperienced and improperly trained, or some other reason? (All 17 state directors who were asked this question cited one or more reason.)

	Number
Inexperienced	3
Improperly trained	1
Both inexperienced and improperly trained	12
Other	3

19. . . . has this had a positive, negative, or no effect on your ability to achieve your state program goals? (All 17 state directors who were asked this question responded. State directors answering "positive," "no effect," or "don't know" were referred to question 21.)

	Number
Positive	0
Negative	12
No effect	4
Don't know	1

20. Could you give us an example of the negative effect this situation has had on your state program?

All 12 state special education directors who were asked this question provided examples of negative effects particular situations had on their state program.

21. Does OSEP provide technical assistance to your state? (i.e., applying specific program knowledge and/or special skills) (47 state directors responded.)

	Number	Percent
Yes	17	36
No	30	64

22. What kind of technical assistance is provided to you by OSEP?

39 state special education directors described the kinds of technical assistance OSEP provided.

23. What methods does OSEP use in providing technical assistance to your state? (46 respondents cited one or more method.)

	Number
Telephone	42
Memos & directives	35
Letters specific to your state	39
On-site visits	35
National or regional conferences	43
Other	27

24. How would you rate the amount of technical assistance provided to your state by OSEP? (47 state directors responded.)

	Number	Percent
Too much	0	0
About right	10	21
Not enough	37	79
Don t know	0	0

25. Over the last three years, approximately how many times have you requested and received on-site technical assistance (T/A) in your state from OSEP officials or staff?

41 states said "none."
7 states said "1 to 2" T/A visits.
2 states said "3 to 5" T/A visits.
1 state said "6 to 8" T/A visits.

26. Within the same three year period, have you requested on-site technical assistance and had it denied by OSEP? (State directors answering "no" or "don't know" were referred to question 30.)

	Number	Percent
Yes	6	12
No	45	88
Don't know	0	0

27. Approximately how many times was on-site technical assistance requested but denied by OSEP within the last three years? (All 6 state directors who were asked this question responded.)

3 states said 1 request denied.

3 states said 3 requests denied.

28. For what reason(s) do you believe that this (these) requested visit(s) was denied? (5 of 6 state directors who were asked this question cited one or more reason.)

	Number
Budget restrictions	4
Lack of authority from OSEP director to authorize visits	2
Other	1

IV. OSEP Management

29. Over the past several years, OSEP has had several managerial positions vacant for extended periods of time or certain managerial positions have been filled with people functioning in an "acting" capacity. Are you aware of this situation. (If state directors answered "no," they were referred to question 33.)

	Number	Percent
Yes	50	98
No	1	2

30. Has this situation within OSEP had a positive, negative, or no effect on achieving your state program goals? (If respondents answered "positive," "no effect," or "don't know," they were referred to question 33.) (All 50 state directors who were asked this question responded.)

	Number	Percent
Positive	0	0
Negative	31	62
No effect	17	34
Don't know	2	4

31. Could you give us one example of the effect vacant managerial positions within OSEP or such positions filled by an individual in an "acting" capacity has had on your state program?

27 state special education directors provided examples of negative effects vacant managerial positions or individuals in an "acting" capacity within OSEP had or their state program.

V. Program Monitoring

32. How is OSEP program monitoring usually performed? (51 state directors cited one or more method.)

	Number
By telephone	12
By on-site visits	49
Other	13

33. Over the last three years, approximately how many times have on-site monitoring visits been performed in your state by OSEP officials or staff? (If respondents answered "none," they were referred to question 35.)

12 states indicated "none."
38 states indicated "1 visit."
1 state indicated "2 visits."

34. In regard to the most recent OSEP monitoring visit, how soon after the monitoring visit was completed did you receive a monitoring visit report?

	Number
Within 3 months	1
Within 6 months	9
Within 9 months	1
Within 12 months	2
12 to 24 months	11
Over 24 months	2
Other (at the time we made the calls, 20 of these 25 states had not received a final report from their most recent monitoring visit)	25

VI. Other

35. In conclusion, is there any other issue regarding your state's relationship with the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services and/or OSEP that you would like to comment on?

45 state special education directors described additional issues.

List of Data for Figures

Table V.1: Response Rates by OSERS Components (Figure 4)

Component	Number of respondents	Response rate (%)
OAS	9 of 18	50
RSA	103 of 126	82
OSEP	63 of 89	71
NIDRR	12 of 17	71

Table V.2: Units With Written Plans (Figure 12)

	Number of respondents
Total responded	185
Respondents in units with written plans	109
Respondents with written plans who cited plan as useful	86

Table V.3: Key OSERS Positions Vacant or Filled With Acting Personnel (Figure 16)

Month/year	Key OSERS Positions	Positions vacant or acting
February 1988	56	21
February 1989	56	14

Comments From the Department of Education

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY
FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

SEP 5 1989

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United States General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Thompson:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Select Education, House Committee on Education and Labor, titled "Education Department: Observations on Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services." This informational report is based upon data obtained in response to a detailed survey instrument which was mailed to 250 staff in the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS).

Although we have questions about the methodology upon which the GAO report was based, many of the conclusions in the report are consistent with my own assessment of management problems in OSERS. In particular I have concerns regarding excess centralization of authority, lack of collegiality and meaningfully-shared decision-making, poor communications internally and externally, and problems with obtaining and allocating organizational resources. We recognize that the complex and persistent management problems of OSERS cannot be solved immediately. However, the new management team in OSERS considers returning sound management practices and improved morale to OSERS to be one of its highest priorities.

It is important to note that despite the problems identified by GAO, OSERS has continued to award and administer program appropriations of approximately $3.7 billion per year. Funds to grantees have been obligated on schedule and services to students and clients have not been interrupted.

As a result of our review of the needs of OSERS, we are planning corrective actions to address areas relating to goal setting, management of human resources and the grant making process, and our relationship with the States.

OSERS will develop a set of cross-cutting goals intended to provide a conceptual framework for the administration of programs and the allocation and use of Federal resources. These goals will complement and help guide the more specialized and shorter-term plans now used for budgeting, grants and contracts scheduling and management, program monitoring and the development of regulations.

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I have already conducted a one-day retreat with my senior management team to begin the process of developing OSERS-wide goals and objectives. We intend to establish a management system in OSERS that can measure our success in achieving these goals. I have also asked senior management officials of OSERS to meet with their key staff to develop additional goals and objectives for each of the OSERS components. These goals will be developed in full consultation with the professional staff in the three OSERS components, and with the rehabilitation, special education and research communities. Rehabilitation Services Commissioner Nell Carney, for example, has already begun to solicit input from State agencies and other organizations on a strategic plan for RSA.

The management relationships between the Office of the Assistant Secretary (OAS) and the OSERS components are another major area of concern. As a first step in improving management relationships, it is our intention to move to a more decentralized management style. My management philosophy has always been to give senior managers the authority to do their jobs and hold them accountable for the results. We have already taken several actions to pursue a more decentralized management approach. For example, most requests for travel no longer require the approval of the Assistant Secretary. This authority has been delegated to the individual component heads.

I meet on a regular basis with senior management officials to review OSERS-wide issues and problems. Each of the component heads conducts similar meetings with their key staff. In summary, we are moving OSERS toward a more collaborative management system.

The report had substantial findings in the area of human resources management. Unfilled positions, positions occupied for long periods on an "acting" basis, lack of staff competence, and a high staff turnover rate were cited as problems. OSERS has never "hired up" to the present staff ceiling of 424 FTE. We are trying to improve our performance in filling permanent positions. RSA has just filled two critical Regional Commissioner vacancies and expects to fill the remaining vacancy soon. We intend to discuss with the appropriate Department offices ways to expedite the recruitment of key personnel.

We also believe that more specialized training for staff would be desirable. The Horace Mann Learning Center has provided approximately 4300 hours of managerial and administrative training to OSERS employees in FY 1988 and more than 7,000 hours through July 25, 1989. We will explore with the Office of Personnel other mechanisms for providing more specialized training to OSERS staff. We are also exploring methods of providing expanded staff development opportunities internally. A Department-wide Education Program Curriculum Committee has been established to review the training needs of Education Program Specialists and those in related job series, and to recommend training and other development actions required to maintain their expertise.

Program accountability is a high priority of the Department. The Department is developing a series of interrelated program, management, and regulatory changes as part of an "Accountability Initiative" designed to better measure the use and effect of Federal funds. For example, evaluation criteria for making new awards and continuation awards are being reviewed to determine how grantee performance may be better linked to funding. The "Accountability Initiative" is expected to result in more extensive monitoring of grantees. In addition, it is our intention to place the monitoring of the EHA-B program on a more timely and systematic basis. Great progress has been made in reducing the backlog of final reports. We expect to make available shortly a prospective schedule for EHA monitoring visits and believe that sufficient resources will be available to meet this schedule.

Another area we plan to address is the provision of technical assistance to the States. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has initiated efforts to review the role of clearinghouses, institutes, regional resource centers and other projects that provide technical assistance to the field. OSEP will identify and implement strategies to better link, coordinate and expand OSEP technical assistance and leadership efforts to the field as well as ways to better interface with RSA, the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research and other offices within the Department of Education.

The FY 1990 RSA workplan will include a technical assistance component. The new RSA Commissioner regards the provision of timely technical assistance as a top priority because of its preventive qualities.

We believe that our new management team, which includes three senior managers with extensive experience in State government, will effect changes which will improve relations with State agencies. Our planning activities will be designed so that our State partners will have full opportunity to have their views considered.

I hope that this information will be useful in the preparation of your final report.

Sincerely,

Robert R. Davila
Assistant Secretary

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